

The Prospects for Berlin's Foreign Policy and Russia–Germany Relations under Chancellor Olaf Scholz

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**ЕВРАЗИЙСКИЕ
СТРАТЕГИИ**
МГИМО
КОНСАЛТИНГ

Moscow, 2021

1. Germany after the 2021 Elections

SPD, designtagebuch.de

The 8th December 2021 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of German politics and the end of 16 years of dominance of the CDU/CSU alliance under Chancellor Angela Merkel. Her successor is the Social Democratic Olaf Scholz, who leads a new government coalition of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP.

As recently as last year, few could have imagined that the Social Democrats would be able to muster the strength to pull themselves out of the protracted crisis in which they had found themselves, let alone win the elections to the Bundestag. The SPD had struggled with a leadership merry-go-round, dwindling support at the municipal and state levels, and plummeting ratings. Glass half-empty observers predicted that the Social Democrats would lose its status as a “people’s” party in the country.

One of the few in the SPD camp who kept their cool in the deteriorating situation was Minister of Finance Olaf Scholz. Scholz was the first to announce his intention to run for Chancellor back in early 2019. This was a violation of party discipline, as, according to SPD rules, the then leader of the Social Democrats, Andrea Nahles, would automatically be put forward as its candidate for the post of Chancellor. The general response to Scholz’s move within the party was that it was the “wrong time,” the “wrong person” and the “wrong way to go about things.” Next to Armin Laschet and Annalena Baerbock, the SPD’s candidate looked like a boring bureaucrat with little chance of winning the votes of the people. However, Scholz’s image as an “emotionless” politician meant that he was able to avoid the kinds of mistakes and scandals that tanked the



SPD election poster with Olaf Scholz.
«Competence for Germany»

ratings of the Christian Democratic and “green” candidates. The SPD’s slick election campaign spelled out exactly why their candidate was the best person for the job. And it clearly worked, as the party ended up cruising to victory.

There is no doubt that the SPD owes its success in the 2021 federal election to the phenomenon of its leader, Olaf Scholz. Scholz is well-versed in an extremely broad range of political areas. He has held posts in the legislative and executive branches, as well as in local and regional government bodies, working his way up through the party hierarchy to become the mayor of Germany’s largest port city and then the country’s Minister of Finance. His career trajectory has

steadily trended upwards, without any sharp ups or downs. His cold professionalism has brought him to the highest echelon of German politics and presented him with the opportunity to stand at its helm. His rather unflattering nickname of “Scholzomat” is a nod to his political expertise and no-nonsense style. Scholz has also proven to be a real challenge for journalists at press conferences, holding his cards extremely close to his chest, even by German standards. At least he could not be accused of lying or trying to entice the people with populist statements.

High hopes have been pinned on Scholz’s government. German society appears to be ready for change after the long and relatively calm rule of Angela Merkel. And change most certainly is coming. Politicians and observers agree that new approaches are needed in politics, economics, the social sphere and international relations. Scholz’s cabinet faces a number of new challenges as it embarks upon its work.

First, Angela Merkel’s departure from the post of Federal Chancellor has set a new frame of reference for German politics as a whole. For the first time in over 15 years, the CDU/CSU alliance will be in the opposition. Merkel’s outstanding ratings and the respect she commanded meant that no one in the political field – both among the Christian Democrats and in other parties – could hold a candle to her. Merkel’s departure has brought the tradition of party leaders firing shots at each other back to German politics, something that had been rendered meaningless during Merkel’s tenure given the impossibility of “outplaying” her politically.

Second, the party system in Germany is becoming increasingly fragmented and complex. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, Germany had a classic “two-and-a-half” party system. The major “people’s parties”, the CDU/CSU alliance and the SPD, traded election victories with the help of the liberals from the FDP. The “big coalitions” of conservatives and social democrats proved to have an expiration date. The results of the most recent elections highlight the increasing fragmentation of the party political system in Germany. The Greens burst onto the German political scene in the 1980s on the back of anti-

war sentiments in the country. East German “Democratic socialists” were left in a kind of limbo following reunification before finally coalescing into The Left in the mid-2000s. The problem of multiculturalism and the migration crisis in 2015 allowed right-wing populists from the Alternative for Germany to break into the Bundestag. Some parties not represented in the German parliament formed factions and got individual representatives elected to the Landtags.

While the “people’s parties” remain the biggest political forces in Germany, the era of their unconditional dominance has come to an end. Even at the level of the individual states (Länder), one-party governments have become a thing of the past. New ruling coalitions are increasingly made up of three parties. In some cases, the boycott of the Alternative for Germany forces politicians to form a broad front against right-wing populists spanning all parliamentary parties, from the CDU to The Left. All this creates a new political culture, where the ability to negotiate with opponents (coalition partners) while retaining one’s own political identity and voter base is paramount.

Third, the numerous internal and external challenges facing Germany today requires politicians to take new approaches to solving these issues. Scholz’s cabinet will have to tackle growing social inequality, rebuild the economy following the recession caused by the coronavirus crisis, come up with a consistent migrant policy and implement the ambitious “green deal.” Changes are expected from the new Chancellor, although these changes should not erase or undermine any of the achievements of the “Merkel-era.”

The future of Germany’s foreign policy remains somewhat up in the air. Historically, it has been consistent and inertial. The German economy, which relies heavily on the export of goods and services, needs active foreign policy support. At the same time, Berlin has started to position itself as the “moral leader” of the West and is trying to construct a dialogue on the basis of values. A stable balance needs to be found in this dichotomy of interests and values in German diplomacy.



The leaders of the new ruling coalition: Christian Lindner (FDP), Olaf Scholz (SPD), Annalena Baerbock (The Greens), Robert Habeck (The Greens)

When analysing the prospects for the development of German diplomacy in the coming years, special attention should be paid to the career path of the new head of government, Olaf Scholz. The Federal Chancellery plays a decisive role in determining the main directions of Germany's foreign policy strategy. Despite the fact that the new chancellor will have to make sure his decisions jibe with both the norms of parliamentary democracy in Germany and the position of his party's partners in the ruling coalition, his status means that he has the last word when it comes to solving foreign policy issues.

Scholz's long tenure as Mayor of Hamburg may give us a good idea of how important his role will be in the development of German foreign policy moving forward. As the "gateway to the sea," Germany's largest port city has always enjoyed extensive ties with the outside world. Of course, this does not give the city's mayor carte blanche to pursue an independent foreign policy. But its leadership has always had to demonstrate competencies that are not typically

needed in other federated states of Germany, namely, in international trade, logistics and the world economy. It is precisely this that makes the "Hamburg" period of Scholz's career key to assessing his foreign policy priorities and approaches.

Another important factor is Scholz's political "environment," which in many ways was also fostered during his time in his native Hamburg. Scholz is not known for being heavily reliant on those around him. That said, his circle of professional contacts, which he has retained since becoming Chancellor, will undoubtedly factor into any assessments of his work, including in terms of foreign policy.

The prospects for Germany's foreign policy need to be assessed both in terms of governing documents (the programmes of the parties that make up the ruling coalition) and from the point of view of long-term trends and factors in German politics. And this applies to Russia–Germany relations, which have been affected by a number of internal and external challenges in recent years.

2. The Role of Hamburg in Olaf Scholz's Political Biography

Andreas Vallbracht, hamburg-news.hamburg



Hamburg

There has always been a strong regional dimension to German politics. The federal nature of modern Germany means that this is written into law. The country is broken down into administrative units called *Bundesländer* (federated states) that have broad powers in domestic politics and may actively build international ties.

The socio-political identity of each *Bundesland* is typically based on deep historical roots and a well-established cultural tradition. This is especially true for Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia, Baden-Württemberg and Saxony. The tradition of Hanseatic free cities is particularly strong in Hamburg and Bremen.

The *Länder* factor is directly reflected in political practice in Germany – in both

formal and informal political contexts. For example, there is a kind of in-built prejudice against candidates for the chancellorship from Bavaria, likely because no one wants to give this federated state more power than it already has in German politics. Before the election campaign, Minister-President of Bavaria and leader of the CSU Markus Söder enjoyed a high approval rating and was favoured to become the CDU/CSU's Chancellor candidate. However, the country's political establishment was not enamoured with the idea of having a chancellor from Bavaria, and the Christian Democrats, upon weighing the reputational risks of putting a Bavarian candidate forward, thought better of the whole endeavour.

Another example is the broad representation of Saarland natives in German politics. The problem is that this state on the border with France is greatly inferior to other Bundesländer (including those in the east of Germany) in terms of its economic potential. However, the need to represent the interests of all states in the Bundestag means that a significant number of Saarlanders occupy top positions in the Federal Government. Three ministers in Merkel's previous government were natives of this small state: Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Peter Altmaier, Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas and Minister of Defence Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

Most German politicians start their careers by gaining influence within regional administrations, often in their hometowns or other administrative territorial units. In the right conditions, the steps along the path of the internal party hierarchy run parallel to the lower positions of local self-government bodies or deputy seats in the city council or Landtag. A leadership position at the state level can be both the high point of a political career and a springboard for moving to Berlin.

Olaf Scholz was born on 14 June 1958, in Osnabrück, Lower Saxony. However, his family moved to Hamburg when he was three, settling in the Rahlstedt district in the city's northeast. It was in Hamburg that Scholz embarked on his political career, and the influence of the city on his professional life cannot be overestimated.

Hamburg is the second largest city in Germany (after Berlin) and the third largest in the German-speaking world (after Berlin and Vienna). It has a population of around 1.8 million people. Officially, Hamburg is a separate administrative territorial subject of the Federal Republic of Germany, similar to a city of federal subject significance in Russia. The position of burgomaster (mayor) of Hamburg is thus comparable to that of the prime minister of any federated state. Berlin and Bremen have a similar status.

Hamburg is the largest port in Germany and the third largest port in the European Union in terms of freight turnover after Antwerp (Belgium) and Rotterdam (the Netherlands). Historically,



Olaf Scholz in 1984

the city has served as Germany's "gateway to the sea," receiving the bulk of maritime imports. It was particularly important during the years of the German Empire (1871–1918), when the country's leadership implemented an ambitious programme of naval construction, colonial expansion and increasing foreign trade with non-European countries. The city was almost completely destroyed in an Allied air raid during the Second World War in 1943. However, the city quickly recovered after the end of the war and became the most important trade and economic centre in West Germany.

In terms of its political leanings, Hamburg has traditionally been a Social Democrat city. Dockworkers and employees at the city's large enterprises see the SPD as a mouthpiece representing their interests in the face of "greedy" capitalists. Prior to reunification, the SPD enjoyed success after success in the local elections, forming a government on its own or in coalition with the Free Democratic Party (FDP). The only time it ceded control was in the 2000s, when the CDU governed the city for a decade. But this came to an end in 2011, when the Social Democrats regained their political leadership. In the most recent Hamburg state election, the SPD received more than 40% of the votes, eventually forming a coalition government with the Greens, who managed a massive 11% upswing in votes

from the previous election. Support for the Greens grew the most in constituencies located in the city's central districts. Hamburg thus did not escape the "green wave" that swept across the western *Bundesländer*, giving the Greens additional seats in the Landtage and, in the most prominent cases, seats in state governments.

Despite all this, Hamburg has also seen right-wing populist political forces enjoy success, long before the Alternative for Germany appeared. Back in the early 2000s, the *Partei Rechtsstaatlicher Offensive* (Party for a Rule of Law Offensive) led by Ronald Schill emerged and gained quite the following on the back of its opposition to liberal migration policies, among other things. In the 2001 Hamburg state election, Schill's party won 19.4% of the votes and formed part of the coalition government with the CDU and the FDP. Disagreements within the party caused it to splinter in 2003, resulting in its withdrawal from the coalition and forcing early elections in Hamburg. *The Partei Rechtsstaatlicher Offensive* dissolved in 2007.

Olaf Scholz's career began within the walls of the University of Hamburg. Founded in 1919, the university is one of the youngest higher education institutions in Germany, although this has not stopped it from becoming a highly respected research and educational centre. The university counts five Nobel laureates and Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt among its alumni. Scholz studied at the Faculty of Law, going on to specialize in labour and employment law. It thus goes without saying that he received a high quality education from a prestigious university, one that laid the foundations for his professional life and his future success in politics. In the SPD, he earned a reputation as an expert on legal issues and, as such, was admired by his fellow party members.

Scholz's political career actually started in high school, when he joined the *Jusos*, the youth organization of the SPD. For a young man from a large family of textile workers, this decision was clearly based on the desire to move up the social ladder, which is consistent with the political ideals and social milieu of the time.

The Social Democrats were the main political force in Hamburg and, given Scholz's social background, the choice of party for carving out his political career was in many ways decided for him.

It is important to note that Olaf Scholz's formative years as a politician came during the "golden years" of the SPD. The Social Democrats steered the political course of the country throughout the 1970s. Chancellors Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt were extremely popular among voters and received the support of foreign partners in both the East and the West. The anti-war rhetoric and the principles of the SPD's *Neue Ostpolitik* ("New Eastern Policy") proved to be an important contribution to the détente of the 1970s. The young Scholz undoubtedly felt that he was in the vanguard of a progressive political force and tied his hopes for his own political career with the party.

Scholz became a full member of the SPD during his school time. While his political views during this period were certainly left leaning, he could hardly be labelled a "Marxist," as some experts are prone to do, even though a number of his articles for the party's publications contain scathing criticisms of the "capitalist system." And it should be noted here that the youth branches of political parties in Germany typically adopt more radical positions than their mother parties, and the youth wing of the Social Democrats is no exception. The fact that revolutionary ideas resurfaced in the 1970s through the activities of left-wing radicals from the Red Army Faction also played a role. Scholz was not an oppositionist within the SPD. Rather, his aim was to sharpen the attitudes of the Social Democrats while remaining a visible presence within the party.

After graduating from the University of Hamburg and completing his alternative civilian service, Scholz set up his own legal practice. Shortly thereafter, he was made a partner at the company Zimmermann, Scholz und Partner, which still exists today. As a specialist in labour and employment law, he often defended the rights of people who had been unlawfully dismissed from their jobs. This helped him garner the support of his first followers and

voters, many of whom were personally indebted to the talented lawyer.

In 1994, Scholz became the head of SPD branch in the Hamburg borough of Altona. This part of the city had suffered greatly during Nazi rule and the Second World War. The Jewish population, the largest ethnic group in the area, was evicted from their homes and subsequently exterminated in concentration camps. And houses and industrial facilities were almost completely destroyed in Allied airstrikes. It took Altona until the 1970s to get back on its feet, although it would never look the way it once did, having essentially been rebuilt from scratch.

By the 1990s, Altona had become one of Hamburg's most affluent boroughs. However, it was characterized by a high level of social stratification, with average income and the number of people on benefits varying wildly in different parts of the district. Modern production techniques introduced in the late 1980s led to rising unemployment and growing discontent with the SPD. By the time Scholz was appointed head of the local party cell, a red-green coalition had been formed in the Altona district assembly, reflecting the growing popularity of the Greens in this part of the city. Having barely started his political career, Scholz

was called upon to demonstrate his negotiation skills and form a coalition with the Greens, who had gained a foothold in the Bundestag but had little experience in public administration.

Clearly, Scholz managed to make things work and, in doing so, he earned the trust of Altona residents. In the 1998 German federal election, Scholz ran as a candidate for the district (which was almost identical to the historic Altona), winning with 48.1% of the votes. He would go on to successfully run for election to the Bundestag, representing his "home" district, in 2002, 2005 and 2009, thanks in large part to the support of the residents of Altona. However, in the 2021 elections, he chose to run for an electoral district of Potsdam (Brandenburg), where he had lived with his wife since 2017. He ended up winning 34% of the votes, beating out the Green candidate for Chancellor Annalena Baerbock.

Having won a seat in the Bundestag, Scholz retained strong ties with his hometown. In 2000, he was appointed head of the Social Democrats for Hamburg, a post that he held until 2004, and then again from 2009 to 2018.

Scholz spent a number of months in 2001 as Senator for the Interior of Hamburg (Innensenator, a position that corresponds to the Minister of the Interior at the state level). His

Senatskanzlei, hamburg.de



Olaf Scholz in St. Petersburg



Anti-globalisation activists amid G20 summit in Hamburg

brief tenure is remembered for the introduction of a law permitting the forced use of emetics to gather evidence from suspected drug dealers. The harsh measure, which became the subject of heated public debate, was approved by the Greens of all people, who at the time were part of the ruling coalition.

In the 2000s, Scholz's career continued to develop mainly in Berlin, where he occupied high positions in the party and government. In 2007, Scholz succeeded Franz Müntefering as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, a post he held until the 2009 election. Nevertheless, even during his years as Federal Minister, he strove to spend as much time as possible in Hamburg. Scholz was a frequent passenger on the Berlin–Hamburg train during this period, meaning he was only a 90-minute journey from his hometown – time that he would use the time to study.

Scholz made his triumphant return to Hamburg in 2011. The coalition between the CDU and the Greens that had been governing the city collapsed without having fulfilled its mandate. An early election was called, which the SPD won in a landslide with an absolute majority in the Hamburgische Bürgerschaft (Hamburg's

parliament). Scholz was then nominated by the party as its mayoral candidate. From there, it was just a formality securing the necessary number of votes in parliament to take up his new post. Scholz held the post of burgomaster of Hamburg until 2018, having successfully won re-election in 2015.

It was during this period of Scholz's political career that he became actively involved in foreign policy. As Germany's largest port city, Hamburg has a wide network of foreign contacts and partners. In his role as burgomaster, Scholz was instrumental in the city's international activities. In 2011, Scholz accompanied Angela Merkel on her visit to the United States and took part in a gala dinner hosted by the White House in honour of the German Chancellor. Distinguished foreign guests are always invited to the annual celebrations of Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle in Hamburg, including French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault (2013), British Prime Minister David Cameron (2016) and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (2017).

Hamburg turned into a centre of world politics during Scholz's time in office, hosting the G20 Summit in 2017. While the city managed for

the most part to fend off the anti-globalists and looters, the protest events that took place did take some of the shine off Scholz's image. Although the criticisms levied at the burgomaster and his team for insufficient security measures and the excessively harsh actions of the police failed to stick. Scholz used the Summit to build and strengthen personal contacts with the leaders of the most important countries in the world, including Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Developing relations with Russia was among Scholz's top foreign policy priorities during his time as Mayor of Hamburg, along with furthering ties with European and American partners. In 1957, Hamburg established sister-city relations with Leningrad (St. Petersburg since 1991), which developed intensively both during the Cold War and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, Hamburg organized the delivery of humanitarian aid to the people of St. Petersburg, and it is entirely possible that the young Social Democrat Olaf Scholz was involved in this in some capacity, helping out the city's leadership. Scholz made frequent visits to the Russian sister city as Mayor of Hamburg to participate in events such as the Petersburger Dialog (St. Petersburg dialogue) in 2016 and the 60th anniversary of the partnership between Hamburg and St. Petersburg in 2017.

Scholz's time in Hamburg came to end when he was appointed Minister of Finance in Angela Merkel's government, which was formed following the 2017 elections. From this moment on, he would devote himself entirely to the national and international dimensions of his country's politics. He and his wife, Britta Ernst, upped sticks and left for Potsdam. The move was certainly in the best interests of both career-wise. Potsdam, which borders Berlin (a single transport system serves both localities), was the perfect place to live for Scholz in his new capacity as a member of the government. Potsdam also became the main place of work for his wife, Britta Ernst, who was installed as Minister for Education, Youth and Sport of Brandenburg in 2017 (Potsdam is the capital of the federated state of Brandenburg).

How important is Hamburg for Olaf Scholz as Federal Chancellor?

First and foremost, Hamburg served as his training ground – the place where he developed his professional competencies as a politician, manager and administrator. The importance of Hamburg for the German economy and foreign trade relations, and its long-standing tradition of business activity and independence dating back to the days of the Hanseatic League, demanded that Scholz demonstrate the most outstanding qualities as the city's mayor. Having moved up the political ranks in Hamburg from young SPD activist to head of the local party branch and then mayor, Scholz acquired the knowledge and skills needed to work in federal government, and particularly as president. His re-election to the post of burgomaster in 2015 proves that he must have been doing something right.

Something that will no doubt come in handy for Scholz as the head of the new coalition government is his experience working with the Greens during his time in Hamburg. Scholz's interactions with the Greens date back to the 1990s, and his dealings with them at various levels have generally gone smoothly, with the parties always managing to find a compromise. This experience will certainly work in Scholz's favour as he tries to navigate his way in the "traffic light" coalition with the Greens and the FDP.

Finally, Hamburg is a source of professional ties and contacts for Scholz, and none of these is closer than his wife. As we will see later, Scholz's Hamburg contacts constitute a large part of his success at the national level and in international relations. In many ways, their undying faith in Scholz, even in the most difficult times for the party, was instrumental in his election as Chancellor.

The fact that Germany's current Federal Chancellor is a Hamburg native is unlikely to affect the city's significance as a federated state one way or the other. Hamburgers were afforded no special treatment when it came to selecting the makeup of the new government and SPD faction in the Bundestag. *Bundesländer* representation in German politics will remain unchanged. However, it is possible that new opportunities will open up for Hamburg in terms of lucrative trade and economic contracts.

3. Olaf Scholz's Professional Environment

Over the course of his lengthy career, the new Chancellor has managed to assemble an inner circle of extremely loyal associates – associates whose positions in German politics have been elevated since Scholz was elected leader of the country.

Wolfgang Schmidt

Known in the political circles of Hamburg and Berlin as Scholz's "right hand man," Wolfgang Schmidt is said to enjoy the complete trust of the new Chancellor. And the feeling is mutual. Schmidt has accompanied Scholz at every stage of his career over the past 20 years. He first worked as Scholz's personal assistant during his tenure as the SPD's secretary general. He would go on to serve as Scholz's chief of staff in the latter's capacity as first managing director of the SPD parliamentary group, and then chief of staff during Scholz's time as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (2007–2009). From 2011 to 2018, Schmidt occupied the post of State Secretary in Hamburg and was then named State Secretary for Finance in the previous government.

It was a surprise to absolutely no one when Schmidt was given a high post in the Scholz cabinet following the coalition talks. The reward for his loyalty and long service? The post of Minister for Special Affairs and Head of the Chancellery.

The current term is a great chance for Schmidt to step out of Scholz's shadow and prove himself as a politician in his own right. One of the areas in which he can develop his own personal brand is through foreign policy, an important part of the Federal Chancellery's work. Rumours abound that this is precisely the line that the 51-year-old Schmidt intends to pursue. He certainly has the necessary credentials, having served as Vice President of the International Union of Socialist Youth between 2001 and 2003, head of the International Labour Organization representative office in Germany from 2011 to 2018, and head of external relations in Hamburg.

Pressefoto, handelsblatt.com



Wolfgang Schmidt

Britta Ernst

Twenty-three years of marriage is not the only thing that Britta Ernst and Olaf Scholz have in common. Both are politicians, and both are devoted Social Democrats who started their political careers in Hamburg.

The couple does not seek to draw attention to their family life or let it influence their career trajectories in any way. When Scholz became First Mayor of Hamburg, Ernst stepped down from her position in the local parliament to avoid accusations of nepotism.

Like her husband, Ernst has carved out a successful career for herself in the party and in the civil service. From 2011 to 2014, she served as vice-executive manager of the SPD faction in the Bundestag before being appointed Minister for School and Professional Education of Schleswig-Holstein. After the SPD was defeated in Schleswig-Holstein, she was named Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Brandenburg, a post she retained after her husband became Chancellor. Ernst's work focuses on education and women's rights.

While Ernst does not have a position in the new government, she nevertheless plays an important role in her husband's political career. As Scholz has himself stated, his wife has had a major influence on his attitude towards feminist politics. Women's rights have become a priority

area for Scholz, both in his party work and within the government. It was also featured prominently in the September elections to the Bundestag. One of Scholz's main opponents during the election campaign was Green candidate Annalena Baerbock, who has built her political image around feminist ideas. But Scholz made the necessary adjustments to his own party's campaign in order to appeal to female voters, a tactic that clearly paid off, as the SPD saw a 6% upturn in votes from this demographic compared to the previous elections.

Ernst is the perfect "First Lady" for modern Germany. Her image fits well with the current model of family relations in the country. She achieved success in her own right in politics and was not forced to sacrifice her career for the sake of her husband's success.

Rolf Bösing

Like Wolfgang Schmidt, Rolf Bösing is a long-time associate of Olaf Scholz. They have served in the same state structures, both in



Olaf Scholz and Britta Ernst

Hamburg and at the Federal level, since 2002. In the last cabinet, Bösing worked as Secretary of State in the Federal Ministry of Finance in Germany.

For Scholz, Bösing is an important figure in the financial sector, serving as the link between the government and the real sector. In addition to his work in the government, Bösing also serves on the Deutsche Telekom Supervisory Board, 10% of which is owned by the Ministry of Finance. In the new cabinet Bösing will be responsible for the restoration of the construction ministry.

Steffen Hebestreit

Steffen Hebestreit is a relative newcomer in Olaf Scholz's political entourage. Between 2000 and 2009, he worked as a journalist for the Frankfurter Rundschau newspaper, occupying various positions. And from 2010 to 2014, he was a correspondent for DuMont. After leaving journalism, Hebestreit found employment as the press secretary for SPD General Secretary Yasmin Fahimi. He later started working with Scholz. From 2015 to 2018, he was in charge of the government of Hamburg's Berlin office, before being appointed head of the Department of Communications at the Ministry of Finance. In the new cabinet, Hebestreit occupies the post of official representative of the government of

Bundesministerium der Finanzen



Rolf Bösing

the Federal Republic of Germany. According to Scholz, Hebestreit will be responsible for “constant communication between the government and the public.”

Olaf Scholz is a proponent of long-term and reliable relationships built on trust. The members of his inner circle have diverse backgrounds, have the requisite skills and credentials to carry out their duties, and will continue to contribute to the stability of the new government.

Throughout his career, Scholz has kept close ties with business. However, financial integrity is an important element of the image he seeks to maintain. He does not own shares in any companies other than his own law firm.

Scholz is known for actively supporting German cooperatives such as the Central Association of the German Consumer Cooperatives, where he once worked himself. He frequently attends events held by the association and often speaks at them, thus cementing his status as a true social democrat. Cooperative communities have historically played an important role in the activities of the SPD, and many presidents and leaders of these communities are prominent party members.

Scholz has also managed to forge relationships with the media during his time in politics. For example, when Die Tageszeitung was facing financial difficulties in 2012, Scholz suggested to the newspaper’s Managing Director Karl-Heinz Ruch to transform the company into a cooperative. Ruch took the advice, which ended up saving the newspaper – known for its support of social democratic values – from bankruptcy.

Scholz also maintains contacts with big business, including the German railway operator Deutsche Bahn and its largest airline, Lufthansa. In 2017, Scholz appointed Deutsche Bahn Director Werner Gatzert State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Finance, and in 2020, he supported the adoption of a comprehensive €86-billion investment package to modernize Deutsche Bahn. Lufthansa too fell on hard times



Olaf Scholz and Steffen Hebestreit

as a result of the pandemic and was effectively on the verge of bankruptcy when Scholz stepped in to negotiate a support package worth €6 billion that ended up saving the company.

However, while Scholz’s desire to cater for the business community and place an emphasis on developing the economy certainly earned him additional votes in the elections, it also sparked a number of scandals. Specifically, there were allegations of financial fraud in connection with M. M. Warburg & Co. bank in Hamburg (which was benefitting from questionable tax advantages) and the Wirecard payment (whose books were full of inconsistencies). Scholz is suspected of having known about these bad-faith dealings and turning a blind eye to them.

During the election campaign, certain segments of the media made a point of reminding the German public that these scandals had never been fully resolved and that suspicions most definitely remained. Despite all this, Scholz remained as popular as ever. On the one hand, it was never proven that Scholz had any knowledge of these financial indiscretions, and, on the other, his conduct throughout left no doubt in anyone’s mind that he had done nothing wrong. In his trademark style, Scholz remained calm and collected throughout the whole ordeal. This set him apart from his rivals in the election race, who fared much worse when it came to saving their reputations in the face of various scandals and accusations.

4. Foreign Policy Development Prospects in Germany under Chancellor Olaf Scholz

Germany's foreign policy is marked by its non-changing, consistent nature. In the 70-plus years of Germany's post-war existence, change in government have never led to any significant shifts in the foreign policy of Bonn and then Berlin. Even the "New Eastern Policy" of the Social Democrats, that replaced the hitherto policy of the CDU/CSU in the late 1960s, was linked to structural changes in international politics in general and to a greater extent advanced the diplomatic legacy of the founding Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Konrad Adenauer and his associates.

The foreign policy constants of Germany today were in large part laid down during the early years of the country's post-war existence. The

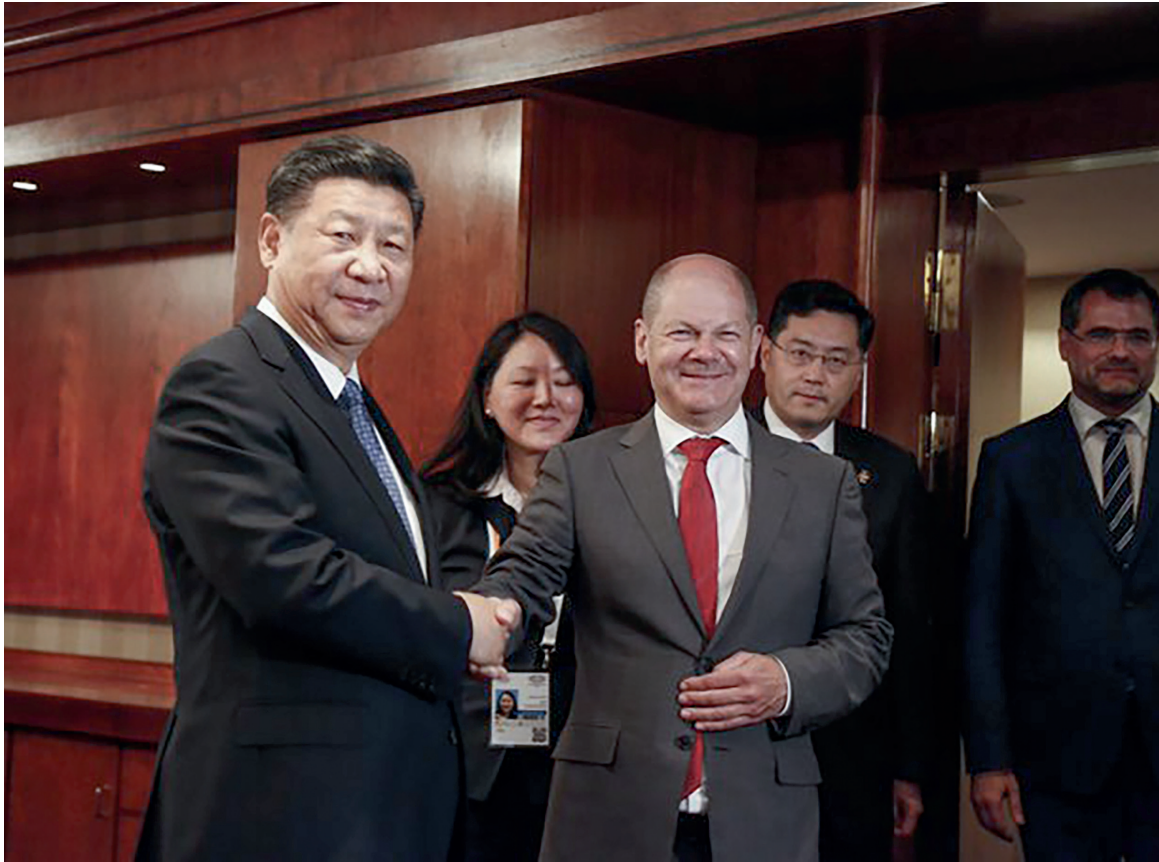
Adenauer government sought to cement West Germany's status as a reliable ally of the United States and an integral part of the community of Western countries. At the same time, until the reunification of Germany in 1990, the sovereignty of West (and East) Germany was kept in check by the member states of the anti-Hitler coalition that won the Second World War. West Germany's accession to NATO in 1955 formally signified that the country was finally a part of the Western system of military and political alliances.

The SPD's foreign policy legacy is an integral part of the German diplomatic tradition. Chancellor Willy Brandt's politics allowed the country to establish stable trade and economic relations with the Warsaw Pact countries. Brandt's kneeling in front of the Monument to the Ghetto

Bundesregierung, bild.de



Joe Biden, Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz amid G20 talks



Olaf Scholz and Xi Jinping

Heroes in Warsaw formed the basis for Germany's newfound understanding of its responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi era. These improved relations with the Soviet Union contributed to the common European policy of "détente." Brandt was building on the foundation laid by Konrad Adenauer, who visited Moscow in 1955.

The SPD's 2021 campaign programme focused on domestic politics, taking a more moderate stance on foreign policy issues. The party called for deepening European integration and expanding cooperation with partners in the European Union and beyond on climate change mitigation, digitalization, healthcare, etc.

The coalition agreement approved by the SPD, Greens and FDP preserved many of the clauses advocated by the Social Democrats. Europe is central to the coalition's foreign policy. The new government is in favour of strengthening Europe's economic, political and military might on the basis of the transatlantic partnership.

According to the agreement, the SPD and its partners plan to boost Germany's standing on the

international stage, primarily by strengthening the European Union, which would involve increasing its capacities and achieving greater autonomy. For this to happen, it is necessary, first of all, to increase the number of decisions that are taken in the Council of the European Union by majority vote rather than unanimously. This will greatly simplify the approval process for European initiatives, especially those related to security and defence policy. These issues have proved to be a sticking point among members, slowing down integration.

Second, according to the Social Democrats, the position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) should be abolished and replaced with the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the European Union. This, they say, will allow the organization to pursue a consolidated foreign policy and speed up the integration process.

Third, the Social Democrats support calls for the creation of a pan-European army. Doing so would bring two goals within touching distance: 1) it would accelerate integration processes

in the security field, and; 2) it would reduce Germany's expenditures on its own Bundeswehr (armed forces).

Fourth, the SPD hopes to push through a more effective sanctions mechanism with regard to EU members, primarily in order to preserve the independence of the judicial system within the Union.

The second constant in the foreign policy of the Social Democrats is the central significance of U.S.–German relations and the primacy of NATO. While the Greens talked about the structural problems within NATO and supported calls to abandon the obligation to allocate 2% of GDP for defence, this criticism was not reflected in the coalition agreement. In fact, the agreement does not contain a single negative word about NATO. On the contrary, it confirms Germany's traditional commitment to Atlantic security structures.

By and large, the wording of the coalition does not differ greatly from that used in the agreements reached in the waning months of Angela Merkel's tenure as Chancellor. Building up the European Union as an autonomous and self-sufficient body on the basis of the Germany–France tandem was the central theme of Merkel's farewell visit to Paris. The outgoing Chancellor reiterated the importance of transatlantic cooperation during talks with Joe Biden on the side-lines of the G20 Rome Summit. The new government will take a two-pronged approach to its relationship with China, one that was proposed by Merkel at the NATO Summit in June and which includes both rivalry and partnership. As Merkel noted in Istanbul in October, Turkey will remain an important EU neighbour and NATO partner despite the difference in values between the two countries.

The coalition agreement is built on a number of positions that can be seen as unifying for the parties:

- The recognition of Germany's special responsibility as the largest EU state and the fourth largest economy in the world;
- The need to create a "rules-based international order" as a condition of peace, prosperity and security and to reflect the challenges posed by climate

change, the need for digitization, and democratization;

- The need to transform the European Union into a "Federal European State" (Föderaler europäischer Bundesstaat);
- The need to increase the strategic autonomy of the European Union by improving decision-making mechanisms that affect the speed at which foreign policy responses are formulated;
- The need to vest the European Parliament and the European Commission with greater powers;
- The need to maintain a strong Franco-German partnership and work within the "Weimar Triangle" (Germany, France and Poland);
- The need to support the accession of Western Balkan states to the European Union.

One way to make European foreign policy more effective is to make foreign policy decisions on the basis of a qualified majority of EU member states, as well as to establish a full-fledged EU ministry of foreign affairs. The possibility of such a reform has been on the table for a long time, but it has never got off the ground because smaller EU states will not let it, fearing that they will lose the opportunity to influence European diplomacy.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Olaf Scholz's government will implement its foreign policy on the basis of the idea of a transatlantic consensus, acting within the common approaches of the West (meaning the United States and its allies). Throughout his professional career (his brief affair with radical leftist ideas in his youth notwithstanding), including his time as First Mayor of Hamburg and Minister of Finance of the Federal Republic of Germany, his campaign rhetoric, and his first steps as Chancellor all point to a readiness to maintain and strengthen transatlantic unity. And this idea is shared by the SPD's partners in the ruling coalition, the Greens and the FDP.

There is a certain hierarchy in the foreign policy priorities of the new government, and this was made clear by the first official visits made by the Chancellor and the Minister of Foreign

Affairs. The first foreign capital that both Scholz and Annalena Baerbock visited was Paris. From there, Baerbock took the train to Brussels to visit the NATO headquarters before completing her tour in Warsaw. Before that, while the coalition negotiations were still taking place, Scholz had taken part in the talks between Angela Merkel and Joe Biden.

The fact that the CDU/CSU alliance, whose loyalty to transatlantic relations was never in doubt, would now be in opposition caused concern in the expert community that some elements of U.S.–Germany relations could change. Specifically, this concerned the SPD's attitude towards the U.S. nuclear weapons located in Germany. As of the time of writing, the United States has 20 B61 nuclear bombs stored at the Buechel Air Base along with their delivery vehicles – Tornado multirole combat aircraft.

Back during the 2017 federal election, the SPD's candidate for Chancellor Martin Schulz (current president of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a political foundation associated with the SPD) called for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Germany. The issue was repeatedly raised in the German parliament following the elections by leader of the Social Democratic Party Rolf Mützenich. Olaf Scholz preferred to avoid the issue of nuclear weapons on German soil altogether during his 2021 election campaign.

The traditionally pacifist Greens meant that they were also likely to support the withdrawal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany. And sure enough, their candidate, Annalena Baerbock, spoke out in favour of this, although the issue did not occupy a prominent place in the Greens' election manifesto, where pacifism was replaced almost completely by climate rhetoric and the protection of minority rights.

With two staunchly anti-war parties in the new German government, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was forced to remind the country's leadership of the need to keep American nuclear weapons on its territory. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow came out with a similar statement. U.S. fears were only allayed after the publication of the coalition agreement, which mentioned nothing

about the possible withdrawal of American weapons from Germany.

It is important to note that foreign policy duties in the new government are divided between the SPD and the Greens. The Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new government is Annalena Baerbock, co-leader of the Greens and a rival of Scholz for the post of Chancellor in the elections.

While Germany's foreign policy is generally considered the prerogative of the Federal Chancellor, having the Greens in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs means that German diplomacy will likely be imbued with initiatives that serve the interests of that party.

For example, the Greens succeeded in having the term "Feminist Foreign Policy" included in the document, where Germany plans to increase the representation of women in international leadership positions. The Greens took this concept from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where a programme to support women in foreign politics has been running since 2014. However, the agreement does not spell out any specific goals and how the government will achieve them.

On the other hand, the views of the Greens, who have transformed from an opposition force to a member of a coalition government, may very well change in the future. During the coalition talks, they criticized new U.S. sanctions against Nord Stream 2. Green member of parliament and foreign policy expert Omid Nouripour noted, "We don't understand what kind of friendship this is supposed to be when one of the sides imposes sanctions on the other for concluding agreements with a third party. But it is Germany's decision, not the United States."

New Minister of Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock has no international relations experience, aside from dealings with countries in the West, which share a broadly similar ideology. During her youth, she spent a year studying in the United States as part of a student exchange programme. She went on to graduate with an LL.M from the London School of Economics before completing an internship at the British Institute of International and Comparative Law. She then served as a member



Olaf Scholz in Washington

of the Green Party's working group on European affairs from 2008 to 2013, where she helped develop the European dimension of the Greens' foreign policy strategy. From 2009 to 2012, she was part of the executive board of the European Green Party. After becoming a member of the Bundestag, she took part in the work of the German-Polish Parliamentary Friendship Group and was Deputy Chair of the Berlin-Taipei Parliamentary Circle of Friends. Baerbock is also a member of the Forum of Young Global Leaders, the German branch of the Union of European Federalists, the European Council on Foreign Relations and Amnesty International.

The very first day of the work of the new government was marked by bickering among representatives of the SPD and the Greens about which party should play the bigger role in determining the country's foreign policy priorities. Without trying to undermine the Chancellor's authority directly, the Greens argued that the concept of a coalition government implies a compromise approach to solving foreign policy problems. It is clear

that this discussion is far from over, and it will continue throughout the work of the newly formed government.

China is another important facet of Germany's foreign policy, and Scholz will certainly pay considerable attention to it. As in the case of Russia, the Greens will resist the attempts of the Social Democrats to continue the moderate course of Angela Merkel, primarily due to Beijing's poor human rights record. Scholz is expected to continue the course towards building up Germany-China and EU-China trade and economic relations. While the Greens and the FDP are against signing an investment agreement with China, Berlin will seek to sign one anyway. Olaf Scholz has worked with Chinese partners in the past, notably during his time in Hamburg, and it is unlikely that he will level any serious criticisms at China. Tellingly, the new German government did not make any hasty decisions with regard to boycotting the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, postponing the issue until consultations with EU partners.

5. Prospects for the Development of Russia–Germany Relations under Chancellor Olaf Scholz

Nikolai Ryutin / Nord Stream 2, rbc.ru



Nord Stream 2

During the Angela Merkel era, Russia–Germany relations went through numerous ups and downs as a result of domestic and foreign challenges. As things stand, Russia–Germany relations have largely lost the openness and dynamism of the early 2000s, although they have managed to preserve the foundations of numerous joint formats in science, education, civil society, etc. Scholz’s cabinet is faced with the task of building its own dialogue with Moscow, starting from a relatively low level of trust between Russians and Germans.

The topic of Russia–Germany relations hardly received a mention during the pre-election debates. The only significant issue that came up was the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Interestingly, the topic was discussed not only from the perspective of Russia–Germany relations, but also in terms of European energy and environmental security. The entire Nord Stream 2 project faced heavy pressure from the United States and a number of EU countries, and the completion of its construction forced German politicians to re-evaluate the balance of economic and political interests in Germany.

The only party that supported calls to shut the project down was the Greens, although they did so without the usual emotional and ideological rhetoric.

The Left and the Alternative for Germany, which have historically been “sympathetic” to Moscow, were not particularly interested in raising the issue of relations with Russia. Both treaded extremely carefully and pragmatically. Right-wing populists needed to strengthen their positions in what for them was an aggressive political environment. The only way to do this was to increase or at least maintain a significant presence in the Bundestag. In the case of the Alternative for Germany, the only way to achieve this is to criticize the government – and foreign policy and relations with Russia are not meaty enough topics for this end. The Left was in a similar situation and chose to focus on social issues during the elections in order to consolidate the core of its electoral base.

Moreover, even if one of the bigger parties in Germany had wanted to play the Russian card in order to win votes, it is not entirely clear what exactly the narrative would have looked like. Calls to lift the sanctions are inextricably linked to the situation in Ukraine, where Germany is unwilling to change its approach. German business has for the most part adapted to the restrictions and would prefer to avoid a serious battle to lift the sanctions.

Even the topic of Russian meddling, which usually receives a glut of attention in the West, was almost completely absent from media reports and expert analyses. German observers expected that the activities of “Russian hackers” would depend on the ratings of the Greens. The growing popularity of this party (the most critical of Russia’s foreign policy) does not suit Moscow, so the opinion that the Russian leadership could agree to a controlled correction of their ratings started to gain traction. However, when the Greens did start to lose popularity, no one suggested that this could have been the result of outside interference. It was without a doubt their domestic policies that failed them. According to German experts, the popularity of the “people’s” parties (the CDU/CSU and the SPD) did not cause alarm in the Kremlin,

since these parties were expected to continue a moderate course in relation to Russia.

In Russia, the German election campaign did not receive nearly the same amount of attention as the presidential election campaign in the United States. And while the Russian media and expert community did follow the main twists and turns of the electoral race, the results were so up in the air that they could not predict who would win with any kind of accuracy. The elections in Germany proved to be just as dull for the Russian general public compared to the pizzazz of the personality-driven U.S. elections, and interest in them was thus extremely limited. Most experts agreed that Russia–Germany relations would continue in the same vein, and when it became obvious that the Greens were not going to win the election, discussions about the possible negative consequences of a change of government in Germany died down.

When the preliminary results of the election were announced, Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov went on record saying that Moscow expected to continue its dialogue with the new German government. Following Olaf Scholz’s election as Chancellor, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin sent him a congratulatory telegram in which he also expressed his hope that the two would continue the constructive cooperation that marked previous administrations.

Like China, Russia is a country towards which Berlin needs to take a special diplomatic approach. Following the events of 2014, Germany finally stopped playing the role of “Moscow’s advocate” in the West that it took up in the 1990s. And Russia, in turn, started to diversify its foreign policy away from Europe. Discussions between representatives of the Russian and German expert communities reflected a mutual understanding that a new stage had begun in relations between Moscow and Berlin.

This does not mean, however, that Russia–Germany relations are beyond salvation or that they have lost any of their “specialness.” They have changed to the extent that the international environment as a whole has changed. Modern Russia and Germany were born at almost the

same time. But they have taken up very different places in world politics in the 30 years since their formation. Russia does not need anyone to “intervene” on its behalf in its dealings with the West, while Germany is busy increasing its influence as an independent actor on the international stage.

That said, there are a number of constants in Russia–Germany relations that serve as a load-bearing structure. Of course, Russia and Germany continue to have an important trade and economic partnership. Neither the sanctions regime nor the coronavirus has been able to seriously disrupt the ties that have been established here. The structure of trade between Moscow and Berlin is growing more complex, moving away from the traditional “resources in exchange for technologies” model.

The multilevel system of ties between Russian and German societies continues to develop in science, education, culture and local self-government. Most dialogue formats in these areas continue to function as normal. For

example, in the summer of 2021, the Russian city of Kaluga hosted a forum of Russian–German partner cities. Various events are held as part of the “Year of Germany in Russia” programmes. On the one hand, it is considered bad taste in Germany today to have an “understanding of Russia,” yet there is a clear demand for high-quality analytics on the topic of Russia in the German information space. It would be no exaggeration to think that the discussion within the German expert community regarding the “specialness” of relations with Russia is an intellectual phenomenon that makes up an important part of the agenda of bilateral relations.

The framework of modern Russia–Germany relations is thus built on the basis of mutual economic interests and a solid structure of intersocial ties. This is enough to prevent bilateral ties from slipping into a negative or, more importantly, confrontational scenario. However, this is not enough to imbue these relations with a qualitatively different content

picture-alliance / Sven Simon, welt.de



Chancellor Willy Brandt in Moscow

without concerted efforts from both the Russian and German sides.

In general, the Russian dimension of Germany's foreign policy under Olaf Scholz can be seen as a combination of cooperation in areas of mutual interest and confrontation in areas where a compromise cannot be found. Despite the controversy surrounding the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, the new German government will continue to support the project. And while the United States and many EU countries will no doubt continue to try and pressure Germany into abandoning the project, the German leadership will not budge. The German government may attempt to open negotiations with Moscow on additional guarantees to ensure the continued transit of gas through Ukraine once Nord Stream 2 is launched at full capacity.

The prospects for dialogue between the Russian and German people are decidedly murkier. All of Germany's political parties, including the Greens, are in favour of strengthening civil society contacts between Germany and Russia. However, there is no agreement between Moscow and Berlin, or within Germany itself, on who these societies represent and how this interaction should be built. The suspension of the Petersburger Dialog forum is a consequence of the different approaches of the Russian and German sides to principles of establishing and furthering communication between representatives of their respective civil societies. Certain elements within the German political space call for building a dialogue through civil societies with representatives of the so-called "non-systemic opposition" in Russia, which angers Moscow, as it sees such a dialogue as an attempt to interfere in the country's domestic affairs. This is the logic behind the Russian government's decision to ban a number of German NGOs in the country.

The part of the coalition agreement pertaining to Russia–Germany relations calls for a restrained approach, which reflects the views of the SPD more than it does those of the Greens and the FDP. A number of tenets can be identified in the document regarding Russia–Germany relations:

- Russia and Germany enjoy a deep and varied relationship;
- Russia is a major player in world politics;
- Relations between Russia and Germany need to be stable and predictable;
- When building Russia–Germany relations, the positions of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe need to be taken into account;
- The German government is willing to work with Russia on matters of global development (hydrogen energy, healthcare, etc.) and in response to global challenges (climate change, environmental protection, etc.).

At the same time, the coalition agreement contains criticisms of Moscow's actions in relation to Ukraine and calls Russia out for restricting civil rights and freedoms in the country.

The emergence of a "green" Minister of Foreign Affairs means that Berlin will step up its specific value rhetoric towards Moscow. First of all, this will not concern environmental and climate issues (where Russia already has experience and is implementing numerous projects) as much as it will the human rights rhetoric in support of the Russian non-systemic opposition, the LGBT movement, national minorities, etc. That said, as the new German government is a coalition, its participants will have to demonstrate a degree of flexibility when it comes to their ideological principles. The Greens will have to take the opinions of other political forces that have different ideas about how to build ties between Russia and Germany into account and adjust their positions accordingly.

The statements of the Social Democrats about the desire to revive Willy Brandt's "Eastern policy" are intriguing. And while Scholz and the party leadership avoid unequivocal statements about what this policy would actually contain, the SPD's desire to roll back to a positive period of Russia–Germany relations can be seen as a step in the right direction. At the same time, it is important to understand that a word-for-word repetition of a policy that existed during the Cold War and a bipolar world order is unpractical today. The Social Democrats have

repeatedly stressed that Brandt's policy was not directed exclusively towards the Soviet Union, but towards the Warsaw Pact countries as a whole.

One way or another, once the new German government is formed, the country's policy towards Russia will continue to stand on the foundation of the economic and social ties between Moscow and Berlin. One thing German politicians do agree on is the need to maintain a dialogue with Russia (despite all the difficulties in this area), which is no less important than the country's relations with the United States. This much was evident during the recent election campaign, during which the candidates offered similar perspectives on the issue.

Large-scale joint projects similar to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline could further the constructive development of Russia–Germany relations. Such initiatives have significant potential for bilateral cooperation by attracting new participants. There is great potential for new Russian–German projects in hydrogen energy, digitalization, the environment, initiatives to modernize infrastructure facilities, etc.

One proposal included in the coalition agreement that could hold promise is the granting of visa-free travel to the European Union for Russian citizens under the age of 25. This initiative has long been discussed at various Russian–German dialogue platforms,



Merkel's farewell visit to Moscow

such as the Potsdamer Begegnungen ("Potsdam Encounters"). But this is the first time that it has been written into an official document of the German government. While it is unlikely that visa-free travel will ever be introduced due to the fact that certain EU countries will never agree to it, its appearance on the agenda may eventually bring about a softening of the rules for processing visa documents and stimulate civil society cooperation between Russia and Germany.

6. Conclusions

Despite the fact that foreign policy was not a hot topic during the 2021 election campaign, the new German government will nevertheless seek to increase the country's involvement in international relations. Germany continues to be the driver of European integration and, as such, cannot

afford to cede any of this authority to other major players within the European Union. Berlin's involvement in the resolution of various international crises is unlikely to bring Germany any significant benefits, although this will not stop it from maintaining a high level of diplomatic activity. Merkel's foreign

policy legacy will not be subject to revision or critical discussion, but will rather receive further development through the efforts of the new German leadership.

The new government is a coalition government, meaning that it will take longer to make foreign policy decisions. With a member of the Greens in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the party will look to add “climate change” and a values-based approach to the German diplomatic agenda. The Greens may test the strength of the SPD’s positions from time to time in an attempt to provoke it through the Ministry, and it will be up to the Federal Chancellery to deal with the consequences.

The liberals will also try to push their own international agenda. Even though the FDP does not have any positions in government that are directly related to foreign policy, it has a vote on foreign policy issues as the political force responsible for ensuring that the letter and spirit of the coalition agreement are properly followed.

Olaf Scholz and his fellow party members will have to combine measures of compromise and pressure to implement their foreign policy. The political experience of the new Chancellor proves that he has outstanding managerial skills. Scholz knows what it is like operating within a coalition government, having led the Social Democrats in one of the districts of Hamburg.

Scholz is also familiar with the intricacies of diplomacy. As former burgomaster of Hamburg and minister of finance, Scholz has been deeply involved in Germany’s foreign policy process. Over the years, he has managed to build personal contacts with many leaders in the West and the East. Scholz’s experience working with Russian and Chinese partners is particularly important given the foreign policy views of the Greens.

Even though the Social Democrats have vowed to revive Willy Brandt’s “New Eastern Policy,” Russia–Germany relations will retain the contradictions that built up during the Merkel era. And it is not so much the presence of the

Greens – who have always been very critical of Moscow – in the new government that will determine just how far this relationship can blossom. Rather, it is the structural problems in relations between Russia and the West as a whole. The situation today is different from that of the 1970s, because the sides have no real reason to call for “easing international tensions” beyond the desire to prevent the escalation of existing conflicts. Placing transatlantic solidarity above all else, which the Social Democrats do, makes it impossible to pursue a policy towards Russia that differs from the Western mainstream approach.

This notwithstanding, the foundation of Russia–Germany relations, which has developed over the course of many decades, leaves the new German government some room for foreign policy initiatives. The preservation of the multi-tiered system of relations between Russia and Germany itself, as well as the systematic work to prevent the degradation of civil society cooperation, can be regarded as a success for German diplomacy. At the same time, however, this foundation can lose its strength if efforts are not made to bolster it.

The launch of the Nord Stream gas pipeline in 2022 will serve as an example of German diplomacy successfully protecting its national interests. Angela Merkel may have come under the greatest amount of pressure in connection with the project, but it is Olaf Scholz who is left to see the work through to its completion. Progress in the Russia–Germany dialogue on hydrogen energy could kickstart the development of the energy dimension of bilateral relations.

The consistency of Germany’s foreign policy does not mean its results are preordained. The Scholz government has been able to develop a relatively consistent roadmap for its international work. However, actually putting it into practice may prove tricky given the potential pushback from the other parties in the ruling coalition. Berlin’s performance on the foreign policy track will largely depend on the professional skills of Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

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