Anti-government protests in Kiev, 2014

Author: Sasha Maksymenko; URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti-government_protests_in_Kiev_(13087644205).jpg

Germany - "Trivializers of Fascism" and "Russia Sympathizers" – the Ukrainian Crisis in the German Debate

Kai Struve

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The situation in Ukraine is the subject of an intense discussion in the public sphere and the media across Europe. But what do we know about how our neighbouring countries are reflecting on the crisis, its historical background and its meaning for the relationship between our countries, Ukraine, Russia and the European Union? During 2014 and 2015 the Cultures of History Forum asked historians and sociologists from more than 15 European countries, the US, Israel and Turkey to reflect on the media coverage and public debates regarding the Ukrainian crisis in their countries. This article focuses on Germany.

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Germany - "Trivializers of Fascism" and "Russia Sympathizers" – the Ukrainian Crisis in the German Debate

The discussion about the protests and the popular uprising in Ukraine triggered by the refusal of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych to sign the association agreement with the EU in November 2013, the debate about the subsequent occupation of the Crimea, and Russia's destabilization of Eastern Ukraine all reveal significant fault lines in Germany linked to German history and the history of German-Russian relations.

From the very beginning the events in Ukraine attracted considerable public attention in Germany, increasingly so with the occupation of the Crimea. The debate in Germany was probably also more controversial than it was in other countries. More recent discussions about Germany's position vis-à-vis Russia have something of a soul-searching quality about them, posing the fundamental question about whether the values of a free and democratic culture are truly anchored in German society.

The Euromaidan: Failed Association Agreement

When Yanukovych "suspended" plans to sign the association agreement with the European Union a week before the EU summit in Vilnius and announced negotiations with Russia instead, the move was perceived by the German public primarily as a conflict between the EU and Russia. Russia, so the argument went, had forced the Ukrainian government to put an end its convergence with the EU by threatening to introduce trade obstacles and other forms of economic pressure if Ukraine continued on this path.[1] At this point most German commentators assumed that Russian policy was not primarily dictated by the fear of economic disadvantages that would arise from Ukraine having closer ties to the EU but that Russia was ultimately more concerned about securing political spheres of influence. At the same time these commentators criticized that the EU was too hesitant and indecisive with regard to Ukraine, i.e., not offering it any clear prospects of joining the Union and not getting the association agreement signed quickly enough even though it was ready for signature as early as 2012. But the EU was also guilty, or so the claim of former German EU commissioner Günther Verheugen, of not making clear enough to Russia and the Euroskeptic segments of Ukrainian society that Ukraine's convergence with the EU would not be allowed to create new divisions and boundaries. Verheugen and others also criticized that Russia had not been sufficiently included in EU policy-making with regard to its eastern neighbor.

Other motives – e.g., those connected to the domestic affairs of Ukraine, concerning Yanukovych's political about-faces or the popular protests – were given scant attention at first except if they had an immediate impact on the release of Yulia Tymoshenko. With the upcoming presidential elections of 2015, Yanukovych was concerned about getting loans to keep his state afloat in light of its misguided economic policy and the massive embezzlement of state money occurring under his watch. While the International Monetary Fund (with EU backing) was demanding reforms and greater transparency in state finances, Russia's sole condition for a 15-billion-dollar loan was that Ukraine renounce its association agreement with the EU.

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The Protests in Kiev

The growing protests in Ukraine since late November 2013 were generally viewed with sympathy by the German media.[2] Reports by German correspondents in Ukraine soon revealed that the demonstrations in Kiev, where hundreds of thousands were gathering by December, were not primarily an expression of a political and cultural divide in the country between a Russian-oriented East and an EU-oriented West. Rather, they were symptomatic of a broad social movement to establish the rule of law and responsible government leadership as reflected in the standards of the European Union – and not in those of Russia and the other potential member states of the Eurasian Union envisioned by Putin.[3] Nuanced reports by foreign correspondents working for German news media, such as Konrad Schuller for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Jörg Eigendorf for Die Welt, and Steffen Dobbert for Die Zeit, helped provide a better understanding of the events. A number of papers also let a variety of Ukrainian intellectuals have their say, such as writers Yurii Andrukhovych and Serhiy Zhadan, or publicist Mykola Riabchuk, bringing voices of Ukrainian civil society into the discussion.[4]

This different perspective on the protests, however – as a fight for the rule of law and against the erosion of democracy – made it necessary to reevalute the massive attempts of the Yanukovych regime and, with it, Russia to denounce the protesters in Ukraine and the occupiers of Maidan Square as fascists and anti-Semites, as "Banderovtsy" (after Stepan Bandera (1909-1959), the leader of the radical nationalist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). The image of Western Ukrainian radical nationalists as brutal collaborators of the German occupiers complicit in their crimes in the Ukraine during World War II has a long tradition dating back to Soviet times and referring mainly to the struggle of Ukrainian nationalists against the re-establishment of Soviet rule in Western Ukraine from 1944 on.[5]

To be sure, radical right-wing forces made up a relatively large share of the occupiers of Kiev's Maidan Square, and symbols of radical Ukrainian nationalism figured prominently as well, including portraits of Stepan Bandera and black-and-red flags, the colors of the OUN he led. The West Ukrainian opposition party Svoboda, which supported the protests at Maidan Square, draws on the tradition of Bandera's OUN. After garnering more than 10 percent of the vote in the last parliamentary elections, however, the party eventually moderated its positon, hence none of its representatives were conspicuous for radical right-wing or anti-Semitic comments during the Maidan protests. The Yanukovych regime, by contrast, used anti-Semitic stereotypes to discredit the opposition.

Another group getting considerable attention in the German media was the so-called "Right Sector", a confederation of various radical militant Ukrainian nationalist groups which played an important role in the "self-defense forces" at the Euromaidan.[6] Attempts in the Ukrainian and Russian press to see such groups at the Euromaidan as a threat to Jews and other minorities in Ukraine were sometimes adopted indiscriminately by German media. These were corrected by other, more balanced reports that more accurately reflected the real significance and role of right-wing forces.[7]

The Position of the Federal Government and German Political Parties

The policy of the German federal government largely corresponded with the prevailing public opinion. It criticized the policy of Russia, was fundamentally sympathetic to the cause of demonstrators at Maidan Square, and pressed Yanukovych and his government to reach a compromise with the opposition.

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Criticism of this prevailing political opinion and the policy of the federal government along with its leading parties came mostly from the leftist party Die Linke and its associated media.[8] The other opposition party, Alliance 90/The Greens, was quick to voice its support for the protesters in Kiev, particularly the Green Party's parliamentary whip in the European Parliament, Rebecca Harms, and Bundestag member Marieluise Beck.[9] Politicians in Die Linke, on the other hand, not only asserted that it was Western politicians' support of the Ukrainian opposition that caused the situation to escalate in the first place; they also accused the Ukrainians of being fascist, both the protesters at the Euromaidan and the provisional Ukrainian interim government formed after Yanukovych's flight.[10] Bundestag member Ulla Jelpke of Die Linke also denounced approximately forty scholars as "trivializers of fascism" when these specialists researching radical nationalism and right-wing extremism in historical and present-day Ukraine issued a statement in early February declaring that, in their view, the protestors in Ukraine were a liberal and democratic mass movement and not an attempted coup d'état by right-wing extremists.[11]

Reader Comments in Internet Forums

Reader comments on reports about Ukraine at the Internet editions of newspapers, however, showed a decidedly critical attitude towards the prevailing interpretation of the media outlined above, increasingly so after the occupation of the Crimea.[12] A considerable number of these comments construed the crisis in Ukraine as the negative consequence of an essentially imperial policy of the EU and/or the West that strives to bring Ukraine into its own sphere of influence. They emphasized the "fascist" elements of Euromaidan and pointed out that the occupation of squares or public buildings without a permit is also illegal in Germany and that police would quickly intervene to break up such demonstrations.[13] These readers showed little understanding for the fact that it was an uprising of the people against the criminal abuse of power by a government that was undermining the rule of law and was now apparently taking further steps to restrict democracy. They disregarded the criminal methods of intimidation, abduction, and murder used by the regime to fight the protests, showing little sympathy for the protesters shot down on Maidan Square by security forces between February 18 and 21. And they ultimately showed a remarkable ignorance of the values of democratic society, whose very foundations soon became the subject of debate in the German media.

The Crimean Crisis: The Occupation of the Crimea as the Failure of Germany's Policy Towards Russia

The events in Ukraine acquired a new international dimension with the occupation of the Crimea. The event signaled a clear break in Germany's relationship to Russia. The overall position of the German government, clearly denouncing Russia's actions while continuing a dialogue with the country despite its annexation of the Crimea, found widespread public support. The fact that Russia's territorial expansion by military means was effectively condoned and – in the words of Volker Ullrich – met with "the mildest of sanctions since the existence of sanctions" may have raised some eyebrows but elicited very few voices of dissent. Vehement reactions were prompted, however, by Federal Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen when she called for strengthening NATO's presence in its easternmost member-states given the considerable panic there following Russia's annexation of the Crimea.

At the same time it was clear that the Russian occupation of the Crimea was tantamount to the failure of

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the West's and, in particular, Germany's policy towards Russia and its government. If Vladimir Putin had previously been perceived by German policy and public opinion as a political partner, though admittedly a difficult one, and if Russia was seen as a country on the way to becoming a constitutional state with a democratic political system, however crooked this path might be, a confrontation had now resurfaced that was reminiscent of the Cold War. By violating the basic international norm that state borders would not be altered by means of military aggression, the Russian government had breached a fundamental principle established in the European system of states since the end of World War II.[15] With that, the project of a "modernization partnership" with Russia seems to have come to an end for the time being. In its place is a policy of containing Russian expansionist tendencies, even if Europe continues its dialogue with Russia.[16] Thus, Russia was guilty of the very thing it had previously accused the EU and/or West of: creating a conflict over spheres of influence.

The "Russia Sympathizers" and their Motives

Perhaps it is therefore not so surprising that the Russian occupation of the Crimea was accompanied by a proliferation of voices in Germany expressing understanding for Russia and blaming the crisis largely on the West or the new government of Ukraine. These voices reflect the unacknowledged failure of their own hopes and expectations for Russia, effectively shifting the blame to others and exonerating the regime set up by Putin. Yet these individuals – usually labelled "Russia" or "Putin sympathziers" in subsequent discussions – completely ignored the democratic opposition in Russia that rejected the occupation of the Crimea and that mobilized large demonstrations in Moscow and other cities.

The "Russia sympathizers" had other motives, however. Perhaps their most prominent representative was former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt. In an interview with the weekly Die Zeit, where Schmidt served as coeditor, he questioned whether the Russian seizure of the Crimea really was a breach of international law, employing equally dubious arguments to speculate "if a Ukrainian nations exists at all".

One of the arguments most frequently used to contend that the Ukraine crisis was essentially due to misguided Western policies was the claim that the eastward expansion of NATO inevitably aroused Russia's suspicions and could only be perceived as hostile. The West, so the argument goes, is now reaping the consequences for its failure since the 1990s to pursue a common security policy with Russia instead of NATO. A core argument is that the Soviet Union willingly gave up its hegemony over Eastern Europe, the GDR included, thus paving the way for the sea change of 1989 and German reunification.

The "Russia sympathizers" in Germany during the Crimean crisis were a motley group of persons guided by different motives. They included representatives of the German economy, who did not want to jeopardize their business interests in Russia and therefore eschewed a clear position, as well as individuals in the employ of state or state-affiliated enterprises in Russia. Beyond this narrow circle of individuals, however, the fear of a negative economic impact in the case of a major confrontation with Russia, not least of all in the area of energy supplies, also played an important role in Germany's position. The majority of "Russia sympathizers" were found in Die Linke party, many of whose members apparently still cultivated old allegiances and enemy stereotypes, failing to recognize that "fascism" nowadays is not so much on the rise in Ukraine as it is in Russia and among its allies. "Russia sympathizers" also included former adherents of the West German peace movement of the 1980s, publicists with a long track record of being anti-NATO, as well as Social Democrats whose visions were shaped by Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik.[17] Numerous other commentators pointed out that Russia's policy

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towards Ukraine was not in Russia's best interests, whose modernization required greater cooperation with the EU, but was motivated primarily by fear among the ruling elite around Putin that they would lose their grip on power in Russia if the reform movement in Ukraine was successful and served as a model for disaffected Russians.[18]

Russia and Ukraine in German Historical Consciousness

There were also "Russia sympathizers" on the conservative side, however, some of whom apparently seemed impressed by Putin's nationalist and great-power line of argument. Here, just like on the leftist side of the political spectrum, there seem to be deeper elements at work, stemming from Germany's many-faceted "Russia complex". This includes an old, idealized image of Russia with romantic associations of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, but also traditions of Prussian/German-Russian hegemony over Eastern Europe since the age of Frederick, Catherine, and Bismarck.[19] Whereas Russia is deeply anchored in the German cultural and historical consciousness, Ukraine, upon gaining independence in 1991, was an utterly "unexpected nation"[20] whose historical and cultural existence continues to be the subject of debate in Germany and is perceived by some (just as it is in Russia) as an aberration of history owing its existence to the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union.[21]

Whereas German public opinion on Russia is partly determined by the memory of German crimes committed during World War II, the image of Ukraine in Germany seems to be linked to the "Banderovtsy", the brutal collaborators of the German occupiers, an image stemming from Soviet propaganda and consciously disseminated by the opponents of Euromaidan as well as by state-controlled media in Russia. This is despite the fact that the Ukrainian territories suffered no less under the Germans than other Soviet areas under German occupation. Indeed, the entire territory of Ukraine was at some point under German occupation, whereas only part of present-day Russia was.

The Discussion on Reader Comments in the Internet and Opinion Polls

The position of the "Russia sympathizers" is certainly a minority one in German public debate and has been the subject of ample criticism. Reader comments on the Internet, however, offer a very different picture, especially after the Crimean crisis. Die Zeit editor Bernd Ulrich wrote that during the Crimean crisis "two-thirds of [Germany's] citizens, voters and readers" were in opposition to "four-fifths of [its] political class."[22] But these reader comments, according to Ulrich, are less symptomatic of a pro-Russian stance than of a deep mistrust of Western politics, especially the United States, a sentiment strengthened by the latter's own wars in violation of international law, above all in Iraq, and most recently by the NSA scandal. All the talk about the rule of law and democracy in recent years is perceived by these readers with cynicism in light of the lip service paid to these values, and only serves to strengthen these readers' anti-Western and anti-American attitudes.

These Internet comments are undoubtedly not representative of the German population at large. Surveys in fact show a clearly growing sense of mistrust towards Russia and the perception of Russia as a threat. But these fears are not big enough in their eyes to warrant the use military force by Germany or the West to resist Russia's expansion in the Crimea and its attempts at destabilization in the region. According to a survey from late March 2014, a clear majority was against a strong NATO presence in Eastern Europe, and a majority also considered it desirable that Germany occupy a "middle position between the West and Russia" instead of being positioned "firmly in a Western alliance". According to a

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different survey, 33 percent even thought Russia had good reasons to annex the Crimea. A relative majority of 43 percent approved of the view that, "Even if the West doesn’t like Russia's policies it should still try to show understanding for these policies and negotiate with Russia. This is the only way to influence Russia."

This corresponds to the position of the German federal government. While unequivocal in its criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine, Germany (like other Western states) has essentially accepted Russia's annexation of the Crimea and is banking on political and economic support for the new government in Kiev as a solution to the problem, using negotiations to prevent further destabilization or even the annexation of Eastern Ukraine by Russia.

Conclusion

All in all, the present Ukraine crisis shows that the memories of World War II are remarkably strong and politically relevant. This is evident not only in the defamation of Western-oriented political forces in Ukraine as "fascists" and "Banderovtsy", in the Russia media's frequently equating the change of government in Kiev with the German invasion of 1941, and in the considerable effect that such images are having in Eastern Ukraine and Russia. The memory of World War II is also one of the key determinants of Germany's policy towards Russia, its perception of Russia having changed very little since Soviet times. A good, cooperative relationship with Russia is seen as part of a process of reconciliation for German crimes committed during the war, whereas any new confrontation is viewed as a failure of this process. In point of fact, however, Germany's moral debt from World War II applies no less to Ukraine and other states in Eastern Europe that now feel increasingly threatened by Russia. The memory of World War II creates an obligation to strengthen the principles of the rule of law and democratic participation in Germany as well as to follow the norms of international law and to honor international agreements in solving conflicts between states. Both of these tenets have been challenged by the current Russian government.

Translation: David Burnett

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Footnotes

1. See, e.g., Stefan Kornelius, Spalter Putin erreicht sein Ziel, Süddeutsche Zeitung (21 November 2013), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/gescheitertes-eu-abkommen-spalter-putin-erreicht-sein-ziel-1.1824522; Ulrich Krökel, Janukowitsch besteht die Mutprobe nicht, Die Zeit (29 November 2013), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2013-11/janukowitsch-osteuropa-europaeische-union; Benjamin Bidder: EU-Abkommen auf Eis: Putin bringt Ukraine auf Ost-Kurs, Spiegel-Online (21 November 2013), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/eu-abkommen-auf-eis-putin-bringt-ukraine-auf-ost-kurs-a-934875.html.
2. Given the sheer number of reports and articles written on the topic, the following analysis cannot be exhaustive. It relies mainly on articles in national daily and weekly newspapers and follows the discussion until mid-April 2014.
3. See, e.g., Daniel Brössler, Warum es in der Ukraine um Europas Zukunft geht, Süddeutsche Zeitung (23 January 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/krise-in-kiew-warum-es-in-der-ukraine-um-europas-zukunft-geht-1.1870629; Gerhard Gnauck: Schon jetzt hat sich die Ukraine europäisiert, Die Welt (17 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article124944734/Schon-jetzt-hat-sich-die-Ukraine-europaeisiert.html.
4. Juri Andruchowytsch, Wenn du überleben willst, knie nieder, Die Welt (6 December 2013), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.welt.de/kultur/article122631222/Wenn-du-ueberleben-willst-knie-nieder.html; on the protests in Kharkiv, Serhij Zhadan, Die Menschen wollen das ganze System neu starten, Die Welt (31 January 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.welt.de/kultur/literarischewelt/article124417178/Die-Menschen-wollen-das-ganze-System-neu-starten.html; Ukraine: Vier Autoren im Gespräch: 'Die da oben dürfen alles, alle anderen dürfen nichts', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (7 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/themen/ukraine-vier-autoren-im-gespraech-die-da-oben-duerfen-alles-alle-anderen-duerfen-nichts-12788663.html; Im Gespräch: Mykola Rjabtschuk, Wer hat die Scharfschützen beauftragt?, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (21 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/im-gespraech-mykola-rjabtschuk-wer-hat-die-scharfschuetzen-beauftragt-12814418.html.
5. The OUN and UPA did in fact commit considerable crimes during World War II. But the image purveyed by Soviet propaganda was largely distorted. The strong politicization of contrary interpretations is still an impediment to a critical evaluation of these topics in Ukraine, see John-Paul Himka, Debates in Ukraine over nationalist involvement in the Holocaust 2004-2008, Nationalities Papers 39 (2011): 353-370.
6. On "Svoboda" and its chairman Oleh Tyahnybok, see Steffen Dobbert, Die Nationalisten als Revolutionstreiber, Die Zeit (6 December 2013), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2013-12/ukraine-protest-swoboda-maidan; well-informed and nuanced: Konrad Schuller, Ohne Wolfsangel, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (10 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/die-ukrainische-opposition-ohne-wolfsangel-12793039.html.
7. See, e.g., Konrad Schuller, Der jüdische Kommandant vom Majdan, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (17 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/ukraine-der-juedische-kommandant-vom-majdan-12805150.html. For a critical look at the charge of anti-Semitism in the discussion about Ukraine, see Anetta Kahane, Das plötzliche Interesse für Antisemitismus, Berliner Zeitung (21 April 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/meinung/kolumne-das-ploetzliche-interesse-fuer-antisemitismus,10808020,26703154.html.
8. See the reporting in Neues Deutschland and Junge Welt, e.g., Klaus Joachim Herrmann, 'Go West!' nicht zum Spottpreis, Neues Deutschland (25 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/925135.go-west-nicht-zum-spottpreis.html; Hannes Hofbauer, Im Geiste von Stepan Bandera, Neues Deutschland (20 February 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/924654.im-geiste-von-stepan-bandera.html; Thomas Eipelbauer, Faschistische Hegemonie, Junge Welt (8 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.jungewelt.de/2014/03-08/021.php.
9. See http://marieluisebeck.de/themen/ukraine with additional references to declarations, initiatives, and reports of the Green Party. On the activities of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, see http://www.boell.de/de/tags/ukraine-de. On the contrary positions of Greens and leftists, see also Matthias Meisner, Kampf um die Krim bei Twitter, Tagesspiegel (16 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/russland-ukraine-gruene-gegen-linke-kampf-um-die-krim-bei-twitter/9621274.html.
10. On the contrary positions in the speeches of Green and leftist Bundestag members in the debates on the situation in Ukraine and the occupation of the Crimea on February 20, 2014 and March 13, 2014, see Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographischer Bericht, 17. Sitzung, pp. 1207-1211 and passim; Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographischer Bericht, 20. Sitzung. Gregor Gysi and others demanded that the federal government end all cooperation with the Ukrainian

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government due to the participation of "fascists", claiming there had been attacks on Jews, ibid., p. 1524.

11. Ulla Jelpke, Faschismusverharmloser, Junge Welt (15 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.jungewelt.de/2014/03-15/021.php. The appeal initiated by Andreas Umland was published at the homepage of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in German translation: http://www.boell.de/de/2014/02/20/euromaidan-freiheitliche-massenbewegung-zivilen-ungehorsams.
12. The reporting of Jakob Augstein, for example, was critical in a similar vein: Die Mär vom irren Iwan, Spiegel (31 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/augstein-zur-krim-krise-deutsche-journalisten-berichten-einseitig-a-961623.html. With a discussion on the charge of biased coverage, see Hannah Beitzer, Blick aus der Blase, Süddeutsche Zeitung (19 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/berichterstattung-ueber-die-krim-krise-blick-aus-der-blase-1.1914499.
13. This finding is not based on a systematic evaluation but on a cursory look at reader comments. Obviously there were many opposing viewpoints expressed here.
14. Von der Leyen fordert mehr Militär an Nato-Grenzen, Der Spiegel (22 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/krim-krise-von-der-leyen-fordert-mehr-praesenz-der-nato-a-960187.html; Florian Gathmann, Von-der-Leyen-Vorschlag: Koalition streitet über Nato-Präsenz im Osten, Der Spiegel (23 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/krim-krise-koalition-streitet-ueber-nato-im-ukraine-konflikt-a-960289.html.
15. Putin's claim that protecting the Russian or Russian-speaking population in Ukraine was the reason for occupying the Crimea and for Russia's involvement in Ukraine elicited various comparisons to Hitler. The Ukrainian and Russian-language internet referred to the Russian president as "Putler" since the very start of the Crimean crisis. Hillary Clinton went on to compare Putin's policy to Hitler's in the 1930s. This was followed by Wolfgang Schäuble, who likened the Russian occupation of the Crimea with the German occupation of the Sudetenland in 1938 and was fiercely criticized for it: Fragwürdiger Vergleich: Clinton zog Parallele zwischen Putin und Hitler, Der Spiegel (5 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/ukraine-konflikt-clinton-zog-parallele-zwischen-putin-und-hitler-a-957147.html; Florian Gathmann and Philipp Wittrock, Ärger um Schäuble: Merkel distanziert sich von Putin-Hitler-Vergleich, Der Spiegel (31 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/krim-krise-schaeubles-putin-hitler-vergleich-sorgt-fuer-wirbel-a-961748.html.
16. On continuity and changes in the position of new Social Democratic Foreign Minister Steinmeier towards Russia, see Jakob Mischke and Andreas Umland, Germany's New Ostpolitik: An Old Foreign Policy Doctrine Gets a Makeover, Foreign Affairs (9 April 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141115/jakob-mischke-and-andreas-umland/germanys-new-ostpolitik.
17. See, e.g., Erhard Eppler, Putin, Mann fürs Böse, Süddeutsche Zeitung (11 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/russlands-praesident-wladimir-putin-mann-fuers-boese-1.1909116; see also the above-mentioned article by Reinhard Mutz and Caroline Uhl, Egon Bahr stimmt einmal Russlands Botschafter zu, Die Welt (7 March 2014).
18. See, e.g., Berthold Kohler, Über die Krim hinaus, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (10 March 2014); Friedrich Schmidt, Medwedjews Doktrin und Putins Politik, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (26 February 2014); Stefan Troebst, Putins Schuss in den eigenen Fuß, Neue Zürcher Zeitung (31 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.nzz.ch/meinung/debatte/putins-schuss-in-den-eigenen-fuss-1.18273856.
19. Gerd Koenen, Der Russland-Komplex: Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900-1945, Munich, 2005; Martin Schulze Wessel, Rußlands Blick auf Preußen. Die polnische Frage in der Diplomatie und der politischen Öffentlichkeit des Zarenreiches und des Sowjetstaates 1697-1947, Stuttgart, 1995. See also the interview with Gerd Koenen, Die Stimmen kommen von links und rechts, Deutschlandfunk (17 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/russland-berichterstattung-die-stimmen-kommen-von-links-und.694.de.html?dram:article_id=280261.
20. Andrew Wilson, The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation, New Haven, 2002.
21. This was the apodictic conclusion of Jörg Baberowski, professor of East European history at Humboldt University in Berlin, who claimed that "Ukraine is a child of Soviet nationality policies", advocating the "right of secession" to parts of Ukraine without, however, mentioning that this "right" had just been carried out by the same Russian armed forces that had hindered it in Chechnya by conducting bloody warfare: Jörg Baberowski, Zwischen den Imperien, Die Zeit (13 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.zeit.de/2014/12/westen-russland-konflikt-geschichte-ukraine. For a criticism of Baberowski's arguments, see Ulrich Schmid, Das ist eine Nation, Die Zeit (20 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.zeit.de/2014/13/ukraine-contra-teilung. For a more nuanced portrayal of Russian-Ukrainian relations in the current debate, see Andreas Kappeler, Russlands imperiales Erbe: Der große Bruder und die kleine Schwester, Neue Zürcher Zeitung (19 March 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/international/auslandnachrichten/der-grosse-bruder-und-die-kleine-schwester-1.18265720.

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22. Volker Ulrich, Wie Putin spaltet, Die Zeit (10 April 2014), retrieved 8 May 2014, URL: http://www.zeit.de/2014/16/russlanddebatte-krimkrise-putin.

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