

Dangerous Waffling by The German Government

by Rainer Apel

WIESBADEN, Aug. 28—German Foreign Minister Franz-Walter Steinmeier is certainly trying, along with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, to steer the Ukraine conflict in the direction of calmer diplomatic negotiations, but his leeway is not very great, because of the self-imposed limits of German foreign policy. So far, his efforts have been insufficient to bring about a sustainable cease-fire and direct talks between the Kiev transitional government and the pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine. But that would be the only way to end the sanctions against Russia and the Russian counter-sanctions, before they do irreparable harm.

One of the limitations of German foreign policy is the failure to speak plainly in opposition to flagrantly anti-Russian politicians in Europe and the United States, especially not to do so publicly. The population has a right to the unvarnished truth about the situation. Instead, the government throws around empty phrases such as “Alliance solidarity,” “Europe stands together,” and other such obfuscatory slogans.

The government is also only putting up passive resistance to certain plans of the NATO radicals for a massive military build-up along the eastern borders of the Alliance with Russia—thus delaying NATO’s eastward expansion, but not really being able to put a stop to it. The constant reminders that Germany “does not go it alone, but always acts in the context of the EU,” blocks any possible creative diplomacy in bilateral relations between Berlin and Moscow, even though that is the only way that the special German interest in preventing conflicts and war could be protected.

A sliver of autonomy may have been visible in Steinmeier’s Ukraine diplomacy, but Chancellor Angela Merkel repeatedly neutralizes it with critical remarks about Putin and the Russian position, and by her failure to criticize the Kiev regime in any way, although it came to power as the result of a coup and not through elections. It is also unclear whether the Chancellor, in her numerous phone calls with the Russian President, has ever put forward anything truly constructive, or whether she has presented only the known positions of the EU and NATO. Merkel has so far not uttered any criticism of the basic policy EU and NATO policy of expansion to the East.

It always takes two to have a dialogue, she says, while accusing Putin of not wanting to talk; yet she apparently expects that the Russian side has to fully adopt the West’s point of view. That’s not going to happen, which also has to do with the fact that neither the EU nor the United States has ever taken up the constructive proposals made

by the Russian side, and therefore the crisis is inexorably increasing.

Industry Breaks Its Silence

Even if it does not come to war in the near future, the economic damage of the EU/NATO escalation strategy is substantial. The Eastern Committee of German Industry has now, after weeks of silence, taken a more critical tone, on the eve of Merkel’s visit to Kiev: With regard to exports to Russia, which were already declining before the decisions on sanctions against Russia—a 15.5% decline in the first half of the year compared with the same period last year—the Committee, as its chairman Eckhard Cordes said in Berlin on Aug. 22, is assuming that this negative trend will intensify due to the reciprocal economic sanctions introduced in August by the EU and Russia. “It cannot be excluded that by the end of the year, we will have a 20-25% decline in exports to Russia. This would jeopardize some 50,000 jobs in Germany.”



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German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier: no room to maneuver.

He continued: “Even the discussion of sanctions in the Spring was poison, given the weakening economy in the EU and Russia. Everything must be done now to stop the spiral of sanctions, so that constructive discussions bring us out of the sanctions mode.” Cordes warned about the unclear provisions of the EU decisions on “dual use” goods. A survey of the Eastern Committee showed that there are problems, for example, with supplying parts for escalators, excavators, pumps, agricultural machines, drilling machines, and railways. “While supplying entire machines is often harmless, their spare parts suddenly become a problem because of a possible military use,” Cordes said. “This uncertainty and increasing delays in supply have the effect that Russian customers, one after another, are looking for suppliers from other countries. We have reason to fear that large sections of the Russian trade structure are shifting toward Asia and Latin America.”

And that this relocation of trade flows risks irreparable damage to German exports. In the Chambers of Industry and Commerce of the German regions most affected by the sanctions, especially in the East, people are saying (although most not publicly) that you cannot do this in a country as export-dependent as Germany, since the markets could be lost for a long time, maybe forever. And because the federal government is backing the West’s sanctions strategy, Germany will inevitably be drawn into the foreseeable expansion of the Western economic war, which, after Russia, will soon focus on the other BRICS countries, which are all expressing solidarity with the Russians, and are replacing a large part of the blocked European exports to Russia. The danger is unfortunately very real, that German industry, due to the government’s solidarity with NATO and the EU, will remain locked out of the investment boom of the BRICS group and the numerous countries of South America, Africa, and Asia that are oriented toward it. If Germany can no longer export to large parts of the world, because it supposedly should not, then millions of jobs in our country are threatened.

The only alternative is for Germany to end its dangerous waffling, free its foreign and foreign trade policy from the straitjackets of the EU and NATO, and actively pursue a policy of cooperation along the Eurasian Land-Bridge, with participation in major infrastructure projects, such as the current expansion of the Suez Canal in Egypt.