

THE BELARUSIAN-GERMAN RELATIONS: KEY FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

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The article considers political, economic and ideological factors of influence on the Belarusian-German relations. The author identifies such events of the late 20th – early 21st centuries as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent states in the post-Soviet space, the unification of Germany, the formation and expansion of the EU as political factors. Special emphasis is placed on the differences between the Belarusian-German relations before and after 1994 and the importance of the internal political situation in Belarus in this regard. The author contrasts the position of Germany on this issue in the first years of independence and after the election of President Alexander Lukashenko, when the issues of human rights and democracy were put forward by Germany as a condition for expanding political cooperation between our countries. Much attention is paid to the argumentation of the thesis on the dependence of the foreign policy of Germany, including bilateral relations with Belarus, on the consolidated policy of the European Union. It is emphasized that despite the demonstration of independence in determining the nature of the Belarusian-German relations, Germany often supported the anti-Belarusian EU resolutions under far-fetched pretexts. At the same time, economic ties between Belarus and Germany are singled out as a positive factor. A number of statistical data confirming the overall positive dynamics of their development are given. However, a more comprehensive comparative analysis of exports and imports shows periodic declines in economic cooperation. One of the reasons the author calls the aggravation of the political and economic situation in Germany. In this regard, he notes the presence of ideological factors of influence, in particular, the growth in the Federal Republic of Germany of extreme right wing and rightleftsentiments, populism in party programs and the decline in the popularity of leading parties.

Keywords: Belarus; Germany; political, economic and ideological factors; the European Union; electorate; political parties of the Federal Republic of Germany.

БЕЛОРУССКО-ГЕРМАНСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ: КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ ФАКТОРЫ ВЛИЯНИЯ

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Рассматриваются политические, экономические и идеологические факторы влияния на белорусско-германские отношения. В качестве политических факторов автор выделяет такие события конца XX – начала XXI в., как распад Советского Союза и образование независимых государств на постсоветском пространстве, объединение Германии, образование и расширение ЕС. Делается акцент на отличиях белорусско-германских отношений до и после 1994 г. и значимости в связи с этим внутривосточной обстановки в Беларуси. Автор противопоставляет позицию ФРГ по этой проблеме в первые годы независимости Беларуси и после избрания А. Г. Лукашенко Президентом Республики Беларусь, когда вопросы соблюдения прав человека и демократии были выдвинуты Германией в качестве условия расширения политического сотрудничества между странами. Аргументируются тезисы о зависимости внешнеполитического курса ФРГ, в том числе и двусторонних отношений с Беларусью, от консолидированной политики

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ЕС. Подчеркивается, что несмотря на демонстрацию самостоятельности в определении характера белорусско-германских отношений, ФРГ под надуманными предложениями зачастую поддерживала антибелорусские резолюции ЕС. Вместе с тем выделяются экономические связи Беларуси и Германии. Приводится ряд статистических данных, подтверждающих общую положительную динамику их развития. Однако более полный сравнительный анализ экспорта и импорта показывает периодические спады экономического сотрудничества. Одной из причин автор называет обострение политической и экономической ситуации в самой Германии. В связи с этим отмечается наличие идеологического фактора влияния, в частности, рост в ФРГ крайне правых и левых настроений, популизма в партийных программах и падение популярности ведущих партий.

Ключевые слова: Беларусь; Германия; политические, экономические и идеологические факторы; Евросоюз; электорат; политические партии ФРГ.

Introduction

The nature of relations between the Republic of Belarus and Germany depends on many factors, which are generally divided into political, economic and ideological. It is difficult to assess their significance and impact on international activities. All of them have either direct or indirect, positive or negative impact on the nature of the Belarusian-German relations.

The wide problematic of the bilateral relations is traditionally on the research focus in the publications of leading Belarusian experts in this sphere. A. Rusakovich considered in details different directions and aspects of the bilateral dynamics in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. The monography “Germany in the foreign policy of Belarus” issued in 2015 as well as the article “Belarus – Germany: main trends and stages of the development of intergovernmental relations in the 1990s – first half of the 2010s” published in the «Journal of the Belarusian State University. International Relations» in 2018 could be evaluated as the most topical among his recent publications relevant to the current development of the Belarusian-German relations and estimation of their perspectives [1; 2]. In turn, V. Froltsov paid attention to evolution of policy of four A. Merkel’s governments to the Eastern European partners including Belarus in 2005–2019 as a reaction of the modern-day German political elite on the contemporary political shifts in this neighboring unpredictable region. The articles “The Eastern and Southeastern European countries in the pre-election programs of the key German parties 2017” and “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus in the program documents of the three governments of Angela Merkel (2005–2017)” published in the «Journal of the Belarusian State University. International Relations» in 2017–2018 as well as “Foreign policy goals and objectives of the A. Merkel’s fourth government” published in the «Journal of International Law and International Relations» in 2018 could be mentioned firstly [3–5]. The historical and conceptual bases of the post-Soviet regional dimension of the German policy since the USSR collapse was presented also in the monography of V. Froltsov “Post-Soviet states in the foreign policy of Germany (1991–2005)” issued in 2013 [6].

It is necessary to name T. Bohn, professor of the Giessen University, as the most prominent modern-day

German researcher of the bilateral relations in 2010s focused on complex evaluation of interdependencies in development of Belarus between East and West and perspectives of cooperation. Among his publications firstly book “A white spot in Europe...: the imagination of Belarus as a contact zone between East and West” (“Ein weißer Fleck in Europa...: Die Imagination der Belarus als Kontaktzone zwischen Ost und West”) published in 2011 together with his Belarusian colleague V. Shadurski, professor of the Belarusian State University should be named [7]. More historically immersed approach is demonstrated in the collective monography “Colorful spots in Belarus: places of remembrance between the Polish-Lithuanian Union and the Russian-Soviet empire” (“Bunte Flecken in Weißrussland: Erinnerungsorte zwischen polnisch-litauischer Union und russisch-sowjetischem Imperium”) published by T. Bohn in 2013 in collaboration with R. Einax and J. Mühlbauer [8].

Nonetheless, some very important factors of the Belarusian-German relations in the 1990s – 2010s are not named and characterized until now. It concerns research publications in both countries. Let consider some aspects of each of them.

Firstly, *the political factor of influence*. In political terms, the very wording of the 1993 Treaty on the Restoration (not establishment) of Belarusian-German relations refers us to their origin.

However, we cannot speak about any continuity, achievements and traditions in our relations with Germany. The motivation of these relations in the early 21st century and 1990s was radically different. In the first case, they were a help in trying to establish itself as a state, in the second case – using the fact of state independence and sovereignty, they were the attempts of establishing itself in the international arena. One of the main factors that has led to this difference in goals were significant differences in the political environment of that period and the present. The conditions of the war of the 1920s put forward tasks for diplomacy to achieve peace. In the 1990s, using a peaceful environment, Belarusian diplomacy set a wider range of goals. In general, it was a task to fit into a completely new post-bipolar world order, finding an acceptable place in it.

If to assess geopolitics as a factor of influence on the Belarusian-German relations, it should be noted that the assessment of the contemporary world order of the leadership of both Belarus and Germany largely coincide.

Speaking at the recent economic forum in Davos, German Chancellor A. Merkel called on all countries to settle international crises by joint efforts and search for compromises, said: "Now we face problems in the multilateral system, and because of this, the international order has been under pressure. We cannot let the existing multilateral system be destroyed. The global architecture will only work if we are capable of dialogue. I think our national interests should take into account the interests of other countries. The global architecture of international politics will work only in conditions of our readiness for compromise" [9]. In fact, A. Merkel condemned the policy of President D. Trump, which is built on the principle of "America Above All".

Here is a recent assessment of the modern world order made by the President of the Republic of Belarus: "This is a time when we are experiencing difficulties because of the beginning, as we often say, of the redistribution of the world. A new world order is being established. There are new states that claim to take a leading position under this sun, and these places are already occupied. Therefore, local conflicts break out... In various parts of the world, the voices of those politicians who put their ambitions above the good of the people are getting louder. Obviously, the old order is crumbling. There is a new re-division of the world"¹ [10].

As it is seen, both the leaders oppose the hegemony of one state and defend the multilateral system of relations. However, it would be mistaken to exaggerate the importance of a certain coincidence in the theoretical assessments of the modern world order by the Belarusian and German leaders, and especially with regard to bilateral relations. When it comes to political and economic practices, each party demonstrates the priority of their interests.

This was especially evident in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, when the factor of influence of geopolitics affected, among other things, the Belarusian-German relations. The mere enumeration of the events that took place during the period, told on their uniqueness. They are the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new independent states, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, the process of globalization in the 21st century and the beginning of de-globalization today. Besides it is the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union of 1992 and enlargement of the EU at the beginning of this century, events in the Balkans of the 1990s. All of them, in varying degrees, influenced the formation of diplomatic relations of states taking into account the realities of the new world order.

The restoration of Belarusian-German relations fits into these conditions. It would have been unthinkable without the accomplishment of such geopolitical events as the collapse of the USSR and the unification of Germany. In every sense, Belarus and Germany were two completely new states with all the ensuing consequences for their diplomacy. They were vulnerable to the factors of the new world, which entered the short-term phase of the unipolar world in the early 1990s. The international weight of the United States in those years was undeniable in the Western community. Western countries, including Germany, were forced to take into consideration the American position in international affairs, including building relations with the CIS countries.

In addition, the Belarusian-German relations of that period were influenced to no less extent by two opposite political processes: centrifugal forces in the post-Soviet area and centripetal forces in Europe. Alongside with other geopolitical factors, they have dramatically influenced the formation of foreign policy concepts of Belarus and Germany. As a result, the United Germany even more integrated into the Western world, Belarus preferred the Eastern vector.

It would seem that such a different "orientation" of Belarus and Germany should have predetermined a weak interest of our countries in each other, wariness and unfriendliness in their relations. However, this is not happening. In general, over the past three decades, bilateral Belarusian-German relations have been characterized by consistency and positive dynamics of their development. Of course, Belarus is not a priority area of German foreign policy. After all, Germany's political and economic weight is disproportionately higher on the world stage. Nevertheless, at the same time, our country is not in the background of German foreign policy. Moreover, after Belarus gained independence the German diplomacy gave our state more and more importance.

The reason is not only that Belarus increased its diplomatic activity every year, but also because of the peacefulness of our policy. The European countries are convinced of Belarus' sincere desire for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation in all its spheres, including bilateral relations. The government of our country is ready to understand and take into account all the nuances of the foreign policies of their Western partners, which reflect their understanding of the world and regional processes. Perhaps, this is the starting point of building Belarusian-German relations.

It should be born in mind that ties are not formed in a political vacuum. What, for example, can be considered significant and relevant for Germany (for example, the current problems of Euro-Atlanticism), seems less significant for Belarus. On the contrary, periodic

¹Hereinafter translated by A. Sh.

problems in Belarusian-Russian relations, although monitored by German diplomats, are inferior in importance, for example, to the topic of the UK's exit from the EU. Each of them measures their foreign policy activity with not only their internal capabilities, but also regarding different assessments of the same political events.

Such differences are particularly evident in the assessment of domestic policy. At the same time, it is noteworthy that Belarus in the history of relations with Germany has never set a requirement for Germany to change any of its domestic political positions as a condition for expanding the scope of cooperation. We have always followed the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. In this regard, the position of Germany was different. The issue of human rights and respect for the principles of democracy has often been put forward by the German side as a necessary condition for the expansion of political dialogue between our countries. In this sense, the difference in Germany's approach to the Belarusian-German relations before and after 1994 is significant.

On the one hand, the maneuvering of the Belarusian state after gaining independence between East and West was perceived in Germany as a chance to lead out our country from the post-Soviet area and subjugate it to European politics. The issue of human rights was not raised at that time and was not an obstacle to cooperation, including its political side. On the contrary, Germany showed great interest in expanding contacts with Belarus at that time.

On 13 March 1992 a visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany H.-D. Genscher to our country and the signing of the Agreement on the Restoration of Diplomatic Relations took place. In the same year, the head of Belarus S. Shushkevich visited Bonn and was received by the German President R. von Weizsacker. In 1992–1994, such fundamental documents for bilateral relations as the Treaty on the Development of Large-Scale Cooperation in the Field of Economy, Industry, Science and Technology (2 April 1993) and the Joint Statement on the Basis of Relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Federal Republic of Germany (25 August 1994) were signed [11].

To a large extent, the diplomatic activity between the two countries in the early 1990s was given more by the process of centrifugal forces in the post-Soviet area and fit into the geopolitics of that time – the search of the states for their place in the new world order. The leaders of the young independent countries understood that the future of their development would depend on whom they would choose as their closest ally and which regional center they would join.

On the other hand, the Belarusian-German relations received a completely different coloring after the election of the first President of the Republic of Belarus, who chose the policy of a comprehensive alliance with Russia as a priority. As a result, the political

component in our relations with Germany was actually reduced to zero. This was largely because Germany in its foreign policy became largely dependent on the foreign policy decisions of the European Union.

During this period and subsequent years, Belarus felt the greatest impact of the EU's consolidated policy on its bilateral relations with the states of this alliance. Despite the official independence in carrying out its foreign policy, each of them, in the end, commensurate the adoption of specific decisions on Belarus with the European vision and assessments of "Belarusian problems". However, even against this background, Germany was often the initiator of positive initiatives and practical cases. To a certain extent, the German Chancellors of the 21st century G. Schroeder and A. Merkel tried to preserve the foundations of Belarusian-German relations and "Eastern policy" as a whole, which have been formulated by K. Kinkel, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of H. Kohl.

Their brief essence is to support consistently political and economic reforms; to promote the integration of the CIS countries into the international institutions; to build a wide space; to establish itself in the markets of the region. As you can see, the intentions were quite "noble". This resulted in warming the relations between our countries since the second half of the 2000s. Berlin expressed its satisfaction with the holding of the presidential elections in Belarus in 2015, as well as the provision of the Minsk platform for the settlement of the conflict in Donbass. As part of this negotiation process, Chancellor A. Merkel visited our country. In 2015, Foreign Minister of Belarus V. Makei visited Germany, which resulted in the restoration of the Minsk forum of the German-Belarusian society [11].

As part of the work of the negotiating group to resolve the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, Foreign Minister of Germany F.-V. Steinmeier visited Belarus twice [12]. The coordinator of the German government for inter-social cooperation with Russia, Central Asia and the Eastern partnership G. Erler also visited Minsk. On behalf of the Federal Government of Germany, he offered an official apology to the Belarusian people for the crimes committed on the territory of Belarus during the World War II [13].

The working visit of Z. Gabriel, the Vice-Chancellor and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, was an evidence of the improvement of the Belarusian-German relations in Belarus on 17 November 2017 [14].

As is noted by the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in Germany, a symbolic joint project and international event was held in Minsk on 31 October – 1 November 2018 that is a meeting of the Main group of the Munich Security Conference, which was attended by a number of influential German politicians. In addition, official parliamentary contacts have also resumed since 2016. At the invitation of the German-Belarusian parliamentary group of the Bundestag in November 2018, the delegation of the Working Group on Coope-

ration with the German Parliament of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus paid its first official visit to Germany [15].

Cooperation on sustainable development and historical memory plays an increasingly important role in the Belarusian-German dialogue. In early 2018, a visit to Germany of the Belarusian delegation headed by M. Shchetkina, Deputy Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, National Coordinator for Sustainable Development Goals. In September 2018, a delegation of Belarusian law enforcement agencies headed by the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Belarus O. Slizhevsky visited Germany to study the German experience in the field of personal data protection. In the context of the implementation of the agreement reached between the Presidents of Belarus and Germany on the establishment of a bilateral Commission of Historians, the first meeting of Belarusian and German scientists was held in December 2018 in Hessen [15].

In the Review of the results of the foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus and the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2018, which was presented in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus in January 2019, it was noted that contacts with Germany were particularly intense last year. On 29 June 2018, German President F.-V. Steinmeier visited Belarus, and this was the first visit of such a level in the history of Belarusian-German relations [15]. During this visit, the head of Germany was received by the President of the Republic of Belarus A. Lukashenko and took part in the opening of the second line of the memorial complex "Trostenets" on 16–18 February 2018. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus V. Makei took part in the 54th Munich security conference. The MFA report noted the active development of inter-parliamentary and interregional cooperation [15].

The Belarusian-German relations are half a mile in the same positive light under the influence of globalization, which has made significant changes in bilateral economic relations.

Secondly, it is *the economic factor of influence*.

In the Belarusian-German relations, the economic factor of influence has become of paramount importance. Germany is one of the leading foreign trade partners of Belarus. As an example, I will bring some statistics. In 2017, bilateral trade amounted to 2846.1 million dollars (125 % by 2016), Belarusian exports reached 1118.1 million dollars (118.4 %), imports – 1728 million dollars (129 %) [16].

In 2017 the main Belarusian export to Germany made up of mineral products (54.6 %), products of forestry and woodworking industry, base metals and products from them, machines, equipment, apparatus and instruments, chemical products, textiles and textile goods, agricultural products and food industry [16].

In 2018, the following commodity structure of exports was formed: mineral products (oil and oil pro-

ducts) – 56.3 %, forest and wood products – 14 %, base metals and products from them – 12.8 %, machinery, equipment, equipment and tools – 5.5 %, chemical products – 4.2 %, textiles and textile products – 2.4 %, agricultural and food products – 1.9 %. In general, Belarusian exports are quite diversified. Belarus exported to Germany goods more than 472 positions (4 positions of Foreign Economic Activity Commodity Nomenclature) [15].

Bilateral trade is characterized by large volumes of investment imports from Germany, which are based on the supply of machinery, equipment and vehicles. Commodity structure of import in 2018 is as follows: machinery, equipment, vehicles, equipment and tools – 54.7 %, chemical products – 23.8 %, base metals and articles thereof – 6.8 %, products of agriculture and food industry – 5.4 %, textiles and textile products – 2.9 %, products of forest and woodworking industry 2.8 % [11].

Imports have a sound investment character. Germany is the number one partner for Belarus in the supply of high-tech equipment, including the modernization of the production base of Belarusian enterprises.

Germany is traditionally among the five countries – the largest investors in the economy of the Republic of Belarus.

If in 2017 the amount of investments attracted from Germany was 142.1 million dollars (137.4 % by 2016), including direct – 87.5 million dollars (94.6 %), direct on a net basis – 26.5 million dollars (98.6 %), then in 2018 Belarus received investments in the amount of 363.7 million dollars, including direct – 113.7 million dollars, direct on a net basis – 66.1 million dollars. In our country, there are 306 companies registered with German capital, there operate 90 representative offices of German companies. German capital is most widely represented in the industrial sector, transport, agriculture, trade and food industry. German investors are showing increased interest in the Industrial Park "The Great Stone". In October 2017 the German company "Lanz Manufactory" became a new resident of the Park [11].

However, these positive statistics should not conceal the negative trends in our economic relations. If we compare the trade turnover of Belarus with Germany in 2012 (4469.1 million dollars), 2013 (4788 million dollars) and 2014 (4119.5 million dollars), 2015 (2471.7 million dollars), 2016 (2276.3 million dollars) and 2017 (2846.1 million dollars), we can note its significant decline (about 1.8 times) [16].

A significant increase to 3301.4 million dollars occurred only in 2018 against the backdrop of improved bilateral relations in the political sphere [11].

Thirdly, *the ideological factor of influence*. Change of electoral moods of the population of Germany towards the right worldview, growth of populism gradually lead in the EU to the power politicians who put nationalism, political and economic selfishness at the forefront. Both the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats

are gradually moving away from their traditional historical foundations.

If earlier the Social Democratic Party of Germany in its political platforms gave priority to domestic social problems, adhering to a balanced line in foreign policy, in recent years, in the desire to raise its credibility with the electorate, it demonstrates a tightening of positions on international problems. For example, at the beginning of 21st century during the reign of G. Schroeder's Sozial demokratische Partei Deutschlands did not hide their sympathy for Russia and its President. Now its representatives in the European Parliament openly support the European sanctions policy.

If the Christian Democrat H. Kohl, even during the confrontation with the USSR, managed to bring bilateral relations with the Soviet Union and then with Russia to an acceptable level for both sides, now the current

position of the Cristian Democratic Union, although not being hostile in essence, still remain in line with the pan-European anti-policy. Of course, all this has a negative impact on the Belarusian-German relations as well.

However, despite all the contradictions and difficulties, there is still a positive perspective for the Belarusian-German relations. They can be brought to a new mutually acceptable level by two common factors – the desire of the peoples of our states to live without war and their desire for technical progress. As for the first factor, it increases the importance of our country in the fight against challenges and threats of the 21st century, such as illegal migration, drug trafficking, human trafficking, international crime. The second factor will facilitate Belarus' accession to the ranks of highly developed states, with consequent positive effects for our international relations.

Conclusion

Evaluating prospects of the Belarusian-German relations, it could be expected that they will continue to develop positively not only in the economic, but also in the political spheres. This process will be facilitated solidly by the expected agreements between the European Union and the Russian Federation on topical European security issues, as well as intensification of the diplomatic activity of the Republic of Belarus in the western dimension.

In many ways, the nature of these relations will be influenced by objective and subjective factors associated with the relevant geopolitical and regional processes, as well as with the trends of the internal policy of both states. In the long term, a successful implemen-

tation of Belarus' economic plans and a convergence of political, economic, and military capabilities of both countries in this regard can play a particularly positive role in expanding bilateral ties.

Taking into account the recent positive trends in the Belarusian-German relations it could be predicted that Germany will see Belarus as a more important political actor not only in the post-Soviet region, but also in the entire European area in the next years. In turn the Republic of Belarus considers Germany as a reliable partner, which is ready for compromises and agreements and focused on promotion of Belarusian security initiatives and mutually beneficial cooperation in Europe.

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