

German Foreign Policy on Russia: Analysis of Public Opinion and Media on Crimean Annexation Sanctions

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Abstract: German and Russian relations at first to be the most important component for the fate of Europe and is known for its strategic partnerships. Germany has a policy of Ostpolitik, the term framework underlying the relationship of openness Germany towards Russia which Germany has always prioritize relations with Russia. This is indicated by a symbiotic relationship that is mutually beneficial to the economies of both countries. However, Germany's policy is starting to fade since the Russian intervention in the Ukrainian crisis that led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Germany began turning around its policy into the sanctions imposed through the European Union. Behind it, the upheaval in the German society between the pro and cons of Russia's sanctions. By using the constructivism perspective, the proposition in this article suggests that the social construction built by the public opinion through the media takes part in shaping the reality of the Russian sanctions. Furthermore, this paper analyzes how public opinion and the media can influence the dynamics of German policy and sanctions against Russia by using the level of public opinion and media analysis.

1 INTRODUCTION

Before the cold German foreign policy towards Russia post Crimean annexation, the relationship between these two countries became a crucial component in shaping the fate of Europe. After the Cold War, Germany adopted a cooperative approach in foreign policy vis-à-vis Moscow in the late 1960s (Krumm 2012: 114-123). Germany's more open attitude toward negotiation and diplomacy is essentially one of the elements in Ostpolitik. Ostpolitik is a special framework term in German policy towards Russia based on the idea that economic and political engagement with Moscow will lead to positive changes both within the Soviet Union (Russia) and in bilateral relations during the Cold War. After the Cold War, the German government adopted a similar posture toward post-Soviet Russia, with a stronger emphasis on promoting change through strengthening the economy. In Ostpolitik it is explained that Germany's policy towards Russia after 1991, precisely post-reunification of West Germany and East Germany, reflects the reinterpretation of the policy of "change through restoration of relations" which is seen to have made unification possible,

together with gratitude for its acceptance of German unification, 2014: 2). The German elite has always believed that peace and stability in Europe can only be achieved with Russia, not to be the opposition of this. This perception is related to the peace of the German political elite after the Second World War and the guilt of Germany towards Russia because of Nazi crimes at the time. At the same time, Russia has become an important market for German exports where Germany is Russia's third largest trading partner, after China and the Netherlands and Russian companies are largely German suppliers of primary energy (Meister, 2014: 2). While Jeman itself is also one of the largest investment suppliers in Russia. This is evidenced by the large amount of FDI from Germany that goes to Russia. As in the industrial sector, the majority of the largest FDI suppliers in automotive manufacturing entering Russia come from Western European countries, especially Germany (Ersnt & Young, 2013: 19).

The German leader indicated a "strategic partnership" in this connection by seeing the successful trade relations between the two countries as profitable politics and has resulted in a symbiotic relationship between politics and business in Russian-German policy. However, Russia's Russian policy has never been driven by the economy alone.

The German and Russian economic partnership is underpinned by vision as a modernization partner that includes knowledge transfer, general projects, workshops and training programs in areas such as health and demographic policies, energy efficiency, infrastructure, education and research, and legal cooperation. German economic stakeholders argue that this cooperation helps Russia to support modernize and diversify the economy and encourage the growth of small and medium-sized businesses in Russia. As foreign investment increases, liberalization and privatization of Russia's economy is an important prerequisite for modernization. Thus, German policy has German investment objectives and knowledge transfer should help modernize the Russian economy, while the Russian government improves conditions for investment by strengthening the rule of law, adopting European standards, economic liberalization, investing in education and research, and eradicating corruption (Meister, 2014: 2). All these reforms should lead to democracy, less corruption, and more of a European Russia. Although this sounds good in theory, but in reality, this idea is at odds with the interests of the Russian political elite. Until the violation of Russia against international law in the annexation of Crimea and separatist military aggression in Donbass, the territory of Ukraine, which destabilize the principle of Ostpolitical fundamentals that made Germany furious and spun the direction of its foreign policy.

2 GERMAN-RUSSIA RELATION DURING MERKEL REIGN

Reframing the Crimean conflict that broke out in 2014, for the first time Germany demonstrated its leadership stance through the EU in an international crisis. After the annexation, the German government, represented by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, insisted that Russia's actions in this over-aggressive Crimean annexation were unfortunate and have damaged what has been a "peace order" for the past 70 years. This is because what Russia is doing is not just a political intervention to support the Crimean separatist referendum of Ukraine, but also military aggression equipped with combat weapons. This is certainly a threat to Germany. Initially, during the annexation, Merkel remained in constant phone contact with Putin, advising Putin to withdraw his aggression from Ukraine while the West could still help save

the country. Merkel gave a stern warning that Russia would be under severe financial sanctions if Putin refused to comply with this warning. Although the imposition of these sanctions will harm the German and European economies themselves, but these sanctions will bring down the Russian economy much deeper and Putin can not expect Russian-German pro business to veto this action (Rinke, 2014: 7).

German foreign policy towards Russia during the crisis of Ukraine was formed by the interaction of domestic and external factors. External factors pushed Berlin to take a critical stance. The United States and some EU member states, particularly Poland and the Baltic states, immediately took up hardliners vis-à-vis Russian policy. Initially, Merkel and Steinmeier sought to resolve the Crimean crisis through negotiations. When this strategy failed, German leaders led efforts to impose sanctions on Russia. Violent sanctions against this Russian action include economic sanctions targeting (1) capital markets (limiting certain trade expenditures 'contracts, equity or similar financial instruments'), (2) defense sector (arms embargo), (3) use of multiple goods (embargo on the use of dual goods and technology), (4) the oil industry (certain technology embargoes related to deep water, the Arctic and oil); Russia's release at the G8 Summit in Sochi in June 2014; suspension of EU-Russia talks on visa matters and the New Testament; first travel ban and asset freeze for 21 Russian individuals; and much more (Raik et al, 2014: 4).

According to the Council of Europe, the main objective of EU sanctions against Russia is to bring about a change in the actions of Russia in Ukraine, namely the annexation of illegal territory and the deliberate destabilization of neighboring sovereign nations. With Russia becoming the EU's biggest neighbor and important trading partner, this is the most challenging EU sanctions policy to date, as well as its foreign policy in general. The EU has been drawn into a geopolitical confrontation with a large regional power. Although arguably lacking a clear strategy, the EU has used its economic power in unprecedented ways and with major strategic implications. However, by 2016 easing sanctions against Russia will gradually be realized if there is "substantial" progress on the Ukrainian issue. A day earlier, German Weekly *Der Spiegel* published a story showing that German Chancellor Angela Merkel is considering raising some early sanctions, such as tourism restrictions, in return for Moscow's cooperation on local elections in eastern Ukraine. As Steinmeyer said in the *Wall Street Journal*:

“In the light of substantial progress, a gradual relaxation of the sanction tools must be possible.”(Steinmeyer in Thomas, 2016)

From these statements it can be seen that Merkel and Steinmeier have given the possibility to ease sanctions for Russia.

3 MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION LEVEL OF ANALYSIS IN FOREIGN POLICY

Media and public opinion are important elements in determining foreign policy regarding understanding, use, basic assumptions, and the advantages and disadvantages of media analysis and opinion levels. There are some basic assumptions held by this public opinion LoA. Firstly, the Liberal Wilsonian assumptions that believe that public opinion should have an effect on the policy making process, especially in a democratic country where society also has control over the elite in the country (Foyle, 1997). In this case the public also plays a role in the supervisor of the passage of the policy, so that when there is a discrepancy and misappropriation, public opinion will appear in order to change government policy. The second assumption believes that public opinion is a representation of the interests of society as a whole and the public has a good understanding so that these opinions and interests will directly influence the policy to be formed (Neack, 2008). The third assumption, when there are events in the global realm that affect the public life aspect in general it will lead to public opinion or can be said there will be a reaction from the public (Neack, 2008). Given this reaction or public opinion, it shows that civil society is not a passive actor, and demands a tangible response to his interests conveyed through public opinion.

The fourth assumption relates to mass media. As stated before, the existence of mass media can accommodate public opinion so that it really reaches the policymakers. In addition, in fact mass media can direct or even form public opinion on certain issues. Thus public opinion can not be separated from the existence of mass media. Furthermore, regarding the use of public opinion LoA, the use or understanding of public opinion LoA can be done through two ways, ie top-down and bottom-up models (Neack, 2008). In the top-down model is an effort by the government of a country in developing public opinion, so it can be said public opinion can not be separated from government influence or

formed by the government. Thus existing public opinion also tends not to be contrary to government policy. This top-down model generally exists in authoritarian countries. While the second model, bottom-up is an opinion that tend to be purely derived from the public, the government can not impose its will, so the influence on public opinion of this second model actually happens from the bottom (society) upwards (government or policy maker).

4 CONSTRUCTIVISM IN MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION

Constructivism, which has the assumption that mass media is not just a message channel, but as a subject constructing reality, views, biases and parenting. In this case, the mass media is seen as a social construction agent that defines reality. Similarly, information or news that is read and heard from the mass media not only describes the reality, and shows the source of information but also the construction of the media itself. Through a variety of instruments owned, the media helped shape the reality. It does not indicate the real reality, but illustrates how the media play a role in constructing reality. The information that appears in the human mind is not an event, but rather something translated by the human mind and mind after it occurs. An information in the media is not synonymous with the facts of events but rather an attempt to reconstruct facts within the core framework of events. This is in reality the result of reality construction by using language as the basic tool, and language can determine what the reflection will be packed about the actual event. The construction of reality often makes an event by adding a positive picture as well as a negative picture. Most events can lead to allegations that can not be separated from the conflict of events that occurred. Conflict occurring in a place can affect to other places caused by things that are less clear. According to Schudson (1995, 141-142), the information or news available in a medium is the result of a social construct that always involves views, symbols and values, how reality is made news depending on how that fact is understood and understood. If the process of meaning always use the symbol elements of certain values then it is impossible news is the face or reflection of a reality itself, then the same event may produce different news because of differences in how to see in this

way of framing, but the difference is in reality finally considered something reasonable.

5 TOP-DOWN MODEL OF MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION ANALYSIS

Although German Chancellor Angela Merkel looks tough to defend her sanctions against Russia, yet beyond that, the upheaval that divides the German society into pro and contra is just the background to this policy's imbalance. Parties in the outline can draw the picture that they are a business community. In analyzing the voice of the people in Germany, the first author used a top-down model, namely by reviewing the results of a survey conducted by the German government on Russian sanctions. Quoting from a Sputnik media, the Russian-German Chamber of Commerce (AHK) announced on October 28, 2016, the survey found that 86 percent of German companies operating in Russia believe that EU sanctions against the country are not in line with their goals and urgent "German-led" the EU to immediately lift this sanction. Of these, 46 percent of respondents wanted delinquent measures removed immediately, and 40 percent wanted gradual appointment. Sanctions against EU-Russian relations have affected 58 percent of the 800 member companies surveyed. According to the survey, the biggest impact lies in the financial markets, and trade in the use of multiple goods. The results also show that 32 percent of respondents rated the economic situation in Russia as stable, and almost half expected economic growth to decline slightly in 2017. According to German companies, the main factors affecting business are the unpredictable economic situation, excessive bureaucracy and inflation (Sax, 2016).

Long before, in February 2016, Interfax, the Russian news agency reported that German companies in Russia have complained of an increasing sustainability slump from the business climate in Russia and forecast negative developments in the economy by 2016. However, they will not abandon the Russian market and supporting the lifting of sanctions against Russia, according to an annual survey of business climate in Russia, conducted by the German-German Chamber of Commerce (AHK) and the European East European Economic Committee. The survey was conducted in January of 2016 and interviewed 152 German companies operating in Russia. The survey

results are presented in Berlin on February 19, 2016 in a "Conference on The Improving of the Image of Russia in Germany" meeting. Mostly, exactly as much as 88 percent of companies that support the removal of these sanctions. The details are 60 percent of respondents choose to lift directly from sanctions, 28 percent want to eliminate gradual restrictions, and only 10 percent choose to keep the sanctions regime, the other two percent support further strengthening (Interfax, 2016).

But the Ukrainian Today a Ukrainian-owned mass media report that nearly half of Germans in favor of the idea of sanctions against Russia over Ukraine, imposed in the summer of 2014, according to the Bertelsmann Foundation survey published by *Wirtschaftswoche* in 2016. A sociologist says social media can provide the impression that Germany is against sanctions, given its pro-Russian activity. As many as 44 percent of Germans support the restrictions that are used as sanctions against Russia. 46 percent of respondents favored extending sanctions imposed in the summer of 2014, while 16 percent still believed that sanctions should even be tightened and only 27 percent of respondents voted to lift sanctions (Ukraine Today, 2016). Another poll conducted by the German government research institute, Infratest Dimap in November 2014, interviewed 1,000 Germans over the age of 14. The survey results show that 58 percent of Germans feel threatened by Russia's foreign policy and 48 percent do not accept or legally recognize the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Although as many as 39 percent of other Germans legally recognize this annexation, it does not mean Germany considers Putin's actions justified. A case example in a Dimap Infratest survey conducted in August found that 80 percent of Germans blame Putin for escalating the conflict in eastern Ukraine (Noack, 2014). This difference of opinion is suspected from East Germany which argues that German government policy is too anti-Russian, whereas on the contrary, West Germany believes that the German government is too kind and friendly towards Russia (Ukraine Today, 2016). Although there is a bias between surveys that have been imposed by German government agencies, but Merkel remains at its founding. He responded that it was too soon to clear this sanction. This is supported by the statement of Foreign Minister of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier which was launched in the *Wall Street Journal*:

"We believe it is still right and necessary to keep up the pressure but at the same time to apply sanctions against Russia in an intelligent way."

Sanctions aren't an end in themselves."(Steinmeyer In Thomas, 2016).

6 BOTTOM-UP MODEL OF PUBLIC OPINION AND MASS MEDIA ANALYSIS

In addition, by reviewing the voice of the people by using a bottom up public opinion analysis model, the author uses the opinion article of a journalist from the German Deutsche Welle mass media, Bernd Johann related how German foreign policy should be directed in this Crimean conflict. Bernd Johann in this regard does not say anything about how the continuation of Russian sanctions should be addressed, but he gave his opinion on the error on the side of Ukrainian leaders. He said that the EU should react to the dire situation in Ukraine with sanctions against those responsible for the violence. He observed months of protests that occurred in the Crimean society to make all those who were involved in the conflict, but this escalation is the main responsibility of the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. He has rejected any dialogue effort with the protest movement and sees only the bloodshed result of his political power in his palace (Johann, 2014). Bernd insists in his opinion article entitled "High Time for Sanctions in Ukraine" that Germany and Europe can not allow such a thing to happen without a harsh response. European politicians have been trying to urge Yanukovich to commit to dialogue for months. But diplomacy will not reap anything if the regime refuses to consider a political solution.

"It is time for Europe to impose sanctions on Ukrainian politicians and officials responsible for the violence. There should be a travel ban to the EU and their EU bank account should be frozen. Nobody wants them in Europe again."(Johann, 2014)

Johann also revealed that relations with Russia should also be reconsidered. Escalations in Ukraine have put relationships under intense pressure. Russia accused the West for its intervention and blamed Europe for the violence. He said that it was an outrageous allegation that lacked basic facts. It is Russia rather than the EU that has actively intervened in Ukraine. This is based on the fact that Moscow announced billions of euros from aid to Ukraine before the police move. Moscow clearly sustains Yanukovich's position by showing support to the Ukrainian president when describing pro-

European protesters as terrorists who are planning a coup d'etat. Such statements make it clear that Russia approves acts of violence taken to stir up protests and that it is toxic to relations between Russia and the European Union (Johann, 2014).

The opinions of some German academics, Kamil Frymark and Artur Ciechanowicz, published on the official website of the European think tank, The Center for Eastern Studies or OSW who argue that Russian aggression against Ukraine and propaganda actions targeting Germany has resulted in an increase in distrust in German society Russia and a more resolute political reaction. In this opinion, they explain how nowadays German politicians are beginning to change their minds to adopt Russian sanctions, such as the Social Democratic Party, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier's coalition. Having become a strategic partner of Germany, Russia has now become a strategic issue. When the Russian-Ukrainian war broke out, the German approach to finding conflict resolution was based on the principle of 'strategic patience' against Russian aggression and on the assumption that Europe was destined to cooperate with Russia as well as the welfare and security of the continent which may only be realized by cooperating with Russia. This attitude is the result of a clash of two concepts for Germany's approach to Russia. First assumes that Russia is a strategic partner of Germany, which is indispensable for maintaining stability in Europe, and that good relations with Russia deserve recognition by the West. Others assume that Russia is a country with significant potential for destructive acts, as exemplified by the Crimean annexation, aggression against Ukraine and military intervention in Syria. As for Germany, Russia is just one significant partner, excluding the EU and the United States, but not the most significant (Frymark & Ciechanowicz, 2016).

The involvement of the two German leaders, Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in working on and implementing the Minsk agreement-a treaty signed by the EU, Russia and Ukraine to implement a ceasefire and restore peace in eastern Ukraine, under conditions including disarmament and exchange of prisoners-did not bring the expected results of Berlin (Frymark & Ciechanowicz, 2016). This is reinforced by German disappointments both with Russia and Ukraine for their non-compliance. The German debate on sanctions imposed on Russia became a domestic political element as formed by the Bundestag election campaign. According to Frymark and Ciechanowicz, the German Government is

becoming impatient with the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreement. At the same time, the German government is opposed to the idea of exerting greater pressure on Ukraine to ensure the implementation of commitments under this agreement and may impose new sanctions on Russia because of its failure to enter into agreements. Berlin realizes that the failure of this deal will be tantamount to a decline in German credibility. This is why the sound is increasingly heard in Germany which indicates that the Minsk treaty must be changed. In this way Germany will maintain the appearance that the peace process is progressing, which in turn will enable the first sanction to be lifted in 2017 (Frymark & Ciechanowicz, 2016). This will encourage the normalization of German relations with Russia, much desired by all German politicians. Although Merkel does not explicitly state that there will be sanctions in 2017, this analysis of Frymark and Ciechanowicz is enough to prove why in late 2016 there has been a demand for Russian sanctions from Russia's political elite.

7 CONCLUSION

In this article, we discussed the beginning of Germany's policy towards Russia and how Germany changed its policy to sanctions because of the armed takeover of Crimea. Cooperation relations between Germany and Russia are key to the EU's fate in both the economic and defense and security sectors. Since the Cold War, even afterwards, Germany has spawned the term "Ostpolitik" framework which guides the openness of diplomatic relations and German negotiations on Russia and establishes a "strategic partnership". This strategic partner is then manifested into a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between Germany and Russia. Russia became Germany's largest supplier of gas and Germany became the largest supplier of automotive manufacturing to Russia's largest investment. However, this Ostpolitik policy began to be considered using since Russia raises a threat to Germany with the outbreak of conflict in the Crimea. German policy towards Russia played a very important role during the Ukrainian crisis. Germany has defended sanctions against Russia, but has also sought mediation to find conflict solutions. Germany under the leadership of Angela Merkel continues to try to tighten Russian sanctions for his actions are considered crossing the line. Russia too much to intervene Ukrainian politics in times of

crisis with its interests to seize the Crimea through the support of a referendum on secession from Ukraine. Not only that, Russia also placed a number of military forces and weaponry in the border regions of Russia and Ukraine and was involved in the war in Donbass, the territory of Ukraine.

In response, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is not afraid to criticize and take firm action against Russia, even Germany is willing to bear the economic impact as implication to impose sanctions on Russia in retaliation for violation of international law in Crimea annexation.

Throughout the dynamics of Russia's sanctions by Germany through the European Union, a number of upheavals occurred in German society that directly or indirectly felt the impact of these sanctions. People's voices also emerged as a response to German policy, to this day even the request to lift Russian sanctions also comes from the political elite. The writer then analyzed German foreign policy under Angela Merkel using the level of analysis of public opinion and the media in influencing the continuation of German policy direction towards Russia. The authors also base the level of analysis of public opinion and media on the view of constructivism by reviewing the social construction contained in public opinion contained in the mass media, so that it can affect the political elite policy makers. Then based on top-down model analysis results in the level of public opinion analysis and media, the German Society in a survey, split into parties that agree to maintain sanctions and parties who disagree. According to a survey conducted by German government agencies such as the Russian-German Chamber of Commerce (AHK), the disagreeing parties came mostly from businesspeople urging the government to immediately lift economic and trade restrictions. This is because German companies predict a decline in economic growth after Russian sanctions. Then using the bottom-up model in the level of public opinion analysis and the media, there are opinions from several German academics published in German-owned mass media that analyze why today's political elites are beginning to voice Russian sanctions. It is the ineffectiveness of the Minsk treaty, a peace treaty ratified by representatives of the European Union, Russia and Ukraine, which is Germany's inability to manage this conflict. The reason, Berlin began to realize that the failure of this deal will be tantamount to the decline in German credibility. Although there has been no new policy on the lifting of German sanctions against Russia either by Chancellor Merkel or Foreign Minister

Steinmeier, the results of surveys and public opinion made in the mass media have received a response that there will be a gradual lifting of these sanctions, even the support of politicians Germany like the Social Democratic Party.

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