



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Germany's security strategy - unambiguity towards Russia; vagueness towards China



The 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany was the first significant manifestations of strong German national sentiment after World War II.

The Germans proudly unfurled their national black-red-gold flags across the country without the burden of debt created by some previous generations, and celebrated football, which they had dominated for decades.

We need to remember this, because Germany published its first comprehensive National Security Strategy last week. It symbolically closed the era of post-WW2 scrupulousness, and made its long-standing significant role in global security frameworks official.

The very fact that Germany has formulated a National Security Strategy is a first-class global event.

Its content corresponds to this form: it positions Germany as an actor willing, and having the resources, to participate in the global top stream of political and security affairs.

Olaf Scholz's government planned the drafting of this document in its coalition agreement in 2021, and thus made a significant shift from Angela Merkel's 16-year rule.

This is also about the Chancellor's strategic courage, which his conservative predecessor did not show, despite the personal influence and charisma she enjoyed globally for years.

Doubts about Russia have been removed

Although this Strategy is part of Scholz's

government programme, the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the sudden development of the German attitude towards the conflicts in its immediate surroundings accelerated it.

Symbolically, the Government's document has a photograph of a destroyed Ukrainian town on the second page with the flag of Ukraine as a symbol of victory and recovery.

"I emphasise all the events to make clear how starkly the security environment has changed for Germany in the past one and a half years", said Chancellor Scholz as he presented the Strategy.

His coalition partner and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Annalena Baerbock, added that everyone "had to learn with the brutal war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine that freedom and peace do not fall from the sky".

The strategy should have finally removed doubts about Germany's attitude towards Russia and its aggression against Ukraine, particularly in terms of Berlin's treatment of the Kremlin in the post-war period.

Long after the start of the Russian invasion, Scholz's government gave reasons to be considered as one (along with France) of the Western actors with the most favourable attitude towards the Kremlin, and an advocate of a post-war compromise.

However, in the meantime, Berlin has become one of the leaders within the bloc of allies in sending military aid to Ukraine by almost tripling this year's aid compared to the support in 2022, from around €2 billion to €5.4 billion, with an obligation to send military support to Ukraine worth €10.5 billion in the following years.

In the National Security Strategy, Germany labels Russia as "the biggest threat to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area", and thus agrees with the position held by NATO and the US.

Germany officially cancelled expectations that it could return to the position of the Kremlin's influential Western advocate, as it appeared during the first months of the Russian invasion.

Focus on the armed forces

Guided by the principle of "policy of integrated security", which extends throughout the entire Strategy, a special focus was on the position of the armed forces, their modernisation, but also their even greater role in the overall security and political framework.

The strategy adopts an obligation to reach the standard of 2% of GDP for defence allocations, and, at the same time, highlights the ambition for the German armed forces to be part of the security leadership at the European and even global level.

"The Federal Government will make the Bundeswehr one of the most effective conventional armed forces in Europe in the coming years, one that is able to respond and act rapidly at all times", states the Strategy.

This is a visible step forward from the previous concept of building international power on the influence of economy and diplomacy. Extending it to military power is inevitable, with major security restructuring in Europe and the world.

Germany is realising that burgeoning trade "ties and diplomacy alone don't provide

security. Peace comes through strength", says Roderick Kefferpütz from the Atlantic Council's Europe Centre.

China and economic interests

The National Security Strategy has not yet given a final answer to the German position towards China. It labels China with the usual "trinity": as "partner, competitor and systemic rival".

At the same time, Germany believes that China "remains a partner without whom many of the most pressing global challenges cannot be resolved".

We will wait for a more detailed answer in the special German strategy towards China, expected next month, and probably with more specifics in Berlin's position, no doubt in harmonisation with the positions of the Euro-Atlantic partners.

This will also be a point of conflict within the German government itself, bearing in mind the more flexible positions of Scholz's Social Democrats towards China and the harsher position advocated by the Greens.

The new Strategy primarily reflects German ambitions for consolidating leadership on European soil. It is also realistic that its relationship with China is more precisely defined in accordance with German economic interests.

In this respect, German interests will move within the framework of risk reduction in the functioning of supply chains, technological innovations and the management of natural resources as key fields where China represents a security challenge.