

How Will *Zeitenwende* Affect Germany's International Role and Its Relationship with Türkiye?

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At a glance

- The notion of Zeitenwende in Germany reflects change and adjustment to the new emerging world order. Yet, it remains debatable whether Zeitenwende has initiated a resilient process of change within German politics.
- Discussion is still ongoing among politicians and experts about whether Germany has kept its promise of improving its army, meeting the NATO requirements, and found ways to establish a beneficial relationship with non-democratic countries. Thus, it remains to be seen whether through Zeitenwende Germany will be politically and militarily stronger and a leading country in the European Union.
- Türkiye is an important country for Germany; economically, strategically, through the links provided by the Turkish community living in Germany. However, that is not enough to support Türkiye's EU membership bid; transactional relationship is currently the best advantageous relationship for both interdependent countries.

Preface

Two years ago, and only three days into the Russian war against Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz addressed the German Bundestag on February 27, 2022. War had returned on European soil. At the core of its speech, Scholz placed the notion of *Zeitenwende*. Thereby, fundamental assumptions of Germany's post-Cold War state identity were put into question. Suddenly, the paradigm of democratic reforms and economic integration towards a liberal 'End of History' appeared untimely. Yet, declaring a new paradigm is anything but tantamount with its implementation. Turning *Zeitenwende* into a structural reform of the German mindset, necessitates a comprehensive strategic discourse. At-tempting to fulfil this challenge, the current German government presented a National Security Strategy in June of 2023.

Ultimately, new strategic alignments must be applied to a respective situation. Accordingly, the following report by Prof. Dr. Özgür Ünal Eriş copes with both dimensions. On a more general note, Prof. Eriş asks how the *Zeitenwende* will affect Germany's international role. Followed by a more specific evaluation on the effects of *Zeitenwende* on Türkiye´s relation to Germany.

Today, Eriş is a professor at Istanbul's 29 Mayıs University. Still, since the early days of her academic career, Eriş focussed on the area of Türkiye´s relation with the European Union with a special emphasis on Germany. Already in 2000, her dissertation examined the importance of the German foreign policy regarding Türkiye's EU-ambitions. In 2004, Eriş continued her academic endeavour for Germany's position on the potential negotiation process. At the time, the hosting institute was the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) while the project was funded by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. Last year´s project was accomplished similarly: KAS provided Eriş with a scholarship whereas the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies as part of SWP invited her to its premises. At this point, we want to thank all participating parties and institutions for ensuring the success of the project. Our thanks are directed as well to the International Visitors' Programmes at the KAS headquarter in Berlin.

2023 was not anything but an ordinary year for Türkiye. In February two massive earthquakes devastated the Southeast of the country. The Turkish republic mourns the death of more than 50 thousand of its citizens. In May elections confirmed Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's position as president and head of the state. His AK Party leads the governing people's alliance in the Turkish parliament. On October 29th Türkiye celebrated the centenary of the republic founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk bringing together an often-polarized people.

Meanwhile, the international community observed how Türkiye managed Sweden´s NATO integration. It took some by surprise when President Erdoğan linked Sweden´s NATO membership to Türkiye's EU accession. In early August, newly appointed Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan complained about the disruption of Türkiye's European Union membership process, describing it as *"strategic blindness"*. Thus, implicitly addressing the challenges connected to discourse on *Zeitenwende* in German politics in and beyond Europe. Simultaneously showing Türkiye´s determination to engage with the West, Europe, and Germany.

We want to congratulate Prof. Dr. Özgür Ünal Eriş for a research project she concluded successfully: Eline sağlık, değerli Özgür Hoca.



Walter **GLOS** & Bruno **HAMM-PÜTT**
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Türkiye

The research that I conducted in Germany entailed making in-depth-interviews with experts, members of the parliament and academicians who have been doing research on the topics that I was interested in: What changes were brought to German foreign policy making as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war and the changing world system and whether these changes had an impact on two interdependent countries, Germany and Türkiye. The research was funded by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Türkiye who has been a leading foundation working on several dimensions of German foreign policy and focusing on specific regions and countries. They have given much support to my research which ultimately want to create a future path for Germany and Türkiye that can be beneficial for both countries yet being realistic at the same time. The report that I created as a result of these interviews therefore is divided into two: The first part makes an analysis of what *Zeitenwende* indeed means and the success and impact of *Zeitenwende* on Germany's position in the world and the second part reflects upon how the changes through *Zeitenwende* affected relations with Türkiye; a country that is very much connected to Germany through various ways and a militarily strong NATO member at the same time. While the first part of the report may be of interest to the Turkish audience to help them catch up with the debate in Germany, the second part of the report may be pioneering for both German and Turkish audiences who would like to come up with a profitable direction in the future for both countries.

- Prof. Dr. Özgür Ünal **ERİŞ**

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Introduction

The international system has witnessed multiple crises since 2008, starting with the 2008 global financial crisis, followed by the 2015 refugee crisis, which led to severe solidarity problems inside the EU. Meanwhile, the prolonged Brexit saga has caused debates and scepticism about European integration. Together, these crises have created a conducive environment for the rise of illiberal political tendencies and unilateral international orientations. In this turbulent climate, there has been a rise of alternative authoritarian or unilateral tendencies challenging the West's democratic and multilateral orientation, not only in Russia and China, but also within the EU, such as in Poland and Hungary, and even in the United States, with the presidency of Donald Trump. These tendencies were reinforced with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and led to severe socio-economic concerns in addition to unprecedented global health problems.

Germany's somewhat hesitant stance within this turbulent international scene has been considered as out of proportion to its massive economic power. Even key geopolitical events, ranging from Russia's annexation of Crimea to major terrorist attacks on European soil, do not seem to have had a major impact on German foreign and defence policy, while defence spending has remained essentially flat. Moreover, based on the influence of major German businesses, German chancellors from Helmut Kohl in the 1990s to Olaf Scholz today, have consistently believed that trade policy and dialogue can improve ties with actual and potential adversaries. That is, *"Wandel durch Annäherung"* (change by means of rapprochement) has morphed into *"Wandel durch Handel"* (change by means of commerce). More specifically, it implies that although not all countries share the same values as Germany, as every country developed a larger stake within the global rules-based order, the authoritarian traits of its adversaries would attenuate and change through trade. Accordingly, German exporters made the country dependent on the Chinese and Russian economies. Therefore, Germany was politically reluctant to review its commitment to the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline with its promise of cheap Russian gas. Instead, it kept hoping it could always maintain a mutually profitable relationship with President Vladmir Putin's Russia (Anheier, 2022).[1]

The September 2021 elections ended the 16 year-long Christian Democratic and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) coalition government under Angela Merkel's leadership. The new government, led by the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in coalition with the Green Party and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), has declared that it will prioritize a democratic and multilateral orientation and the green transformation. However, it has been particularly challenged by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, Germany painfully realized that its business-oriented approach to geopolitics in general and with Russia in particular had failed. Against this backdrop, Chancellor Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech to the German Bundestag on February 27, 2022, three days after the invasion, was regarded as a turning point *(Zeitenwende)* in European history and an important change of mentality.

Chancellor Scholz stated that German foreign policy would change in three main areas. First, Germany would break radically with its traditional Russia policy of *Wandel durch Handel*, wean itself off its Russian power dependencies, and join the unprecedented international sanctions imposed on Moscow. Second, it would increase defence spending and strengthen the military. Third, it would implement a new defence export policy, break with its traditional policy of not shipping arms to war zones, and give Ukraine weapons to defend itself.

With this speech, Chancellor Scholz acknowledged that the thinking so prevalent in German policy circles since the Cold War was based on an illusion. Instead, it recognized that war was still very much a reality for European security and that Germany could no longer outsource its security to others and underspend on its own military. To achieve these new goals, he committed to setting up a special fund of 100 billion euros to invest heavily in the military and move Germany closer to NATO's target

for member states to allocate 2% of the budget to defence spending (Blumenau: November 2022, International Affairs). [2]

Of course, given the party's strong pacifist tendencies, this was a difficult policy for an SPD chancellor to announce. Chancellor Scholz therefore justified these adjustments as the logical consequence of Germany's *Westbindung* (support for European integration and NATO membership), its dedication to the rules-based order, and its long-standing principle of engaging in international cooperation.

Inspired by these major changes in the international scene and its implications for German foreign policy, the present study was conducted to analyse the domestic political debate regarding *Zeitenwende* and its impact on other countries, like Türkiye which is an important NATO member with a very strong defence component and at the same time an important country for Germany for a variety of reasons. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, carried out in Berlin between July and September 2023 with 69 people. These included diplomats, members of parliament, specialists working in think-tanks and civil society organisations, academicians, and members of the media. This report presents the analysis of the interview data in order to answer three main questions:

- **What does *Zeitenwende* mean for German foreign and domestic politics?**
- **Has *Zeitenwende* successfully repositioned Germany internationally? If yes, where does it position Germany for the future?**
- **How has *Zeitenwende* influenced Germany's relationship with Türkiye specifically?**

The following sections present the findings of the research.

Empirical Research: Zeitenwende

Because the term *Zeitenwende* is new to German foreign policy, there were differing interpretations of its meaning.

The meaning of *Zeitenwende*

> *" We are experiencing a Zeitenwende. And that means that the world is no longer the same as the world before."*
>
> *-Chancellor Scholz*

War has returned to Europe. This reality requires Germany to find the means to address the numerous and clearly identified challenges that the *Bundeswehr* (German army) is facing. Thus, it marks the end of three decades of declining defence spending. Instead, Germany has fully committed to reach NATO's goal of each member state's spending 2% of GDP on defence and the historic decision to set up an extraordinary 100 billion euros fund allocated to modernizing the *Bundeswehr*.

It means a change in the way how Germany manages trade and dialogue with non-democratic countries, signalling a retreat from the previous "*Wandel durch Handel* "approach. It provides a new stance for Germany as a dedicated member of the rules-based world order by entering into a dialogue with countries of the Global South. It should be taken into serious consideration that while two-thirds of UN members condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the UN General Assembly, important countries and partners, such as Brazil and South Africa, abstained, not to mention India, which has its own problems with authoritarian populism un-der Modi. The rules-based liberal world order will only survive if it permanently convinces a majority outside the 'West' that it is in their best interests. Given its new role in international politics, Germany will have to engage in constructive dialogue with the countries of the Global South (Tallis, 2023). [3]

Chart 1 presents further details regarding interviewees' definitions of *Zeitenwende.*

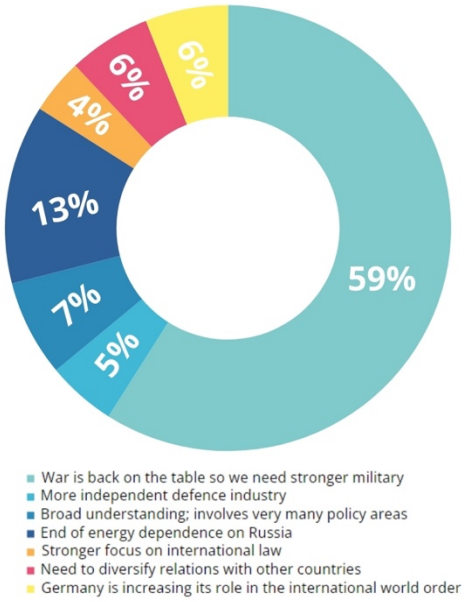


Chart 1: Definition of Zeitenwende

Analysis of successes and failures in *Zeitenwende* practice

This section discusses the interviewees' responses regarding the implementation of Zeitenwende. When Chancellor Scholz delivered his Zeitenwende speech to the Bundestag on February 27, 2022, his acknowledgment of this turning point in German foreign and security policy was perceived by many political elites as a long-awaited moment when Germany would at last face up to a radically transformed security environment and start acting more strategically. Scholz' speech was primarily an important domestic event and an opportunity for the chancellor as the centre-left SPD's leader to demonstrate a willingness to challenge well-established policies and invite the German public and elites (including his own party) to review and abandon certain fundamental foreign and security policy pillars. Hence, it was interesting to observe how it was implemented and what were the gaps between promises and deeds. The interviewees identified both successes and failures in the implementation of Zeitenwende so far.

Successes

By cutting all energy ties with Russia, Germany has ended its vital fossil gas dependency on Moscow, and made a massive commitment to renewables without undermining its financial system or derailing its inexperienced transition. Although the industrial policy challenge of weaning Germany off Russian gas supplies was partly forced by Russia's decision in early September 2022 to cut deliveries through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline, this change was still accomplished much more quickly than believed possible.

In addition, Germany is currently Ukraine's third largest source of naval support, and the third largest source of mixed humanitarian and monetary aid. In 2023 alone, Germany appropriated 7.4 billion euros in humanitarian and military aid for Ukraine, including armored fighting vehicles and air defence equipment. It has also approved the purchase of F-35 fighter jets from the United States and decided to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine (Tenenbaum and Peria-Peigne, 2023: 5-6).[4]

Failures

Unfortunately, doubts remain about whether the *Zeitenwende* really represents a successful structural and mentality change in Germany's foreign and security policy. A majority of the interviewees stated that its deficiencies outweigh its successes, as can be seen from Chart 2.

Several reasons were given regarding the inadequacies of *Zeitenwende* as shown in Chart 3.

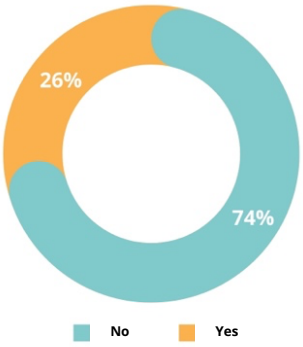


Chart 2: Do you think Zeitenwende has been successful so far?

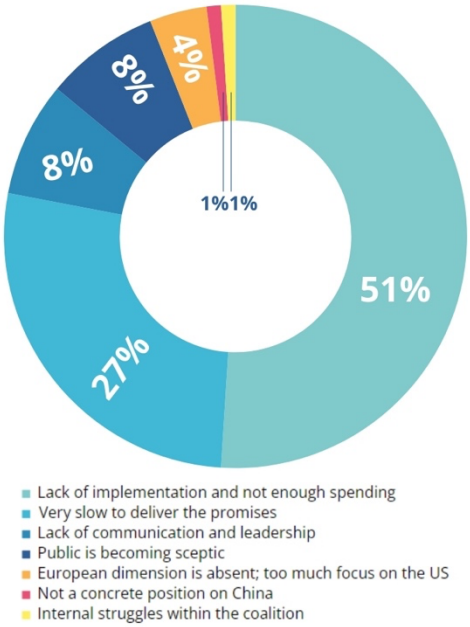


Chart 3: What is the most important problem related to Zeitenwende?

Lack of communication was cited as an important deficiency of *Zeitenwende.* Only the appointment of Boris Pistorius as the new Minister of Defence in January 2023 brought a change in tone that resulted in clearer communication on the concrete steps to be taken in implementing heavy weapons deliveries to Ukraine and increasing defence spending.

Lack of leadership was also seen to be an important problem. Chancellor Scholz has been criticised as acting overly cautiously, for waiting until the last minute to make decisions, and for then only taking decisions after massive international pressure. This makes it seem like he has been dragged reluctantly to certain decisions instead of showing strong leadership.

Lack of implementation was also stated as a problem. *Zeitenwende* was mainly formulated to increase spending on the army. However, very little has been spent of the 100-billion-euro special fund to modernise and upgrade the *Bundeswehr*. Hence, Chancellor Scholz's promise to strengthen the *Bundeswehr* seems to be faltering. Furthermore, the regular German defence budget is set to remain at around 50 billion euros until 2026, with only 8.5 billion euros of the emergency fund earmarked for 2023. Defence spending thus falls short of the 2% NATO target; instead, it is expected to come in just below 2% until 2027, after which defence spending is expected to fall back to around 1.2%. It seems like Germany's bureaucratic procurement processes are likely to erode the special defence fund, which has also been devalued by inflation. None of this suggests a change of era. Indeed, the *Bundeswehr* is in a dismal state, including a lack of functioning equipment, while Germany needs to strengthen its intelligence services, cyber capabilities, and resilience to hybrid threats. Consequently, experts calculate that 300 billion euros are needed if Chancellor Scholz is to make good on his pledge to make Germany "the guarantor of European safety that our allies anticipate us to be." However, these funds are nowhere to be seen and Germany still lacks any structural solution to permanently increase the defence budget. Thus, almost half a year since Chancellor Scholz's speech, his government has yet to present any serious strategy or plan for the *Bundeswehr*'s future, the role Germany intends to play in European collective security, or the contribution of Germany's improved military to warding off the Russian threat (Schütz and Mülling, 2024) [5]

"Zeitenwende currently seems to lack any European dimension."

Lack of implementation is also related to Germany's complex, fragile coalition government, which was established under the conditions of late 2021. The long debates among various sub-coalitions have delayed decisions, which has frustrated German voters and allies abroad. Specifically, the three main ministries mainly involved in *Zeitenwende* are headed by the two coalition parties that have the least in common. With the Greens leading the foreign and economics ministries, and the FDP leading the finance ministry, there have been frequent coordination failures leading to delays and implementation and problems regarding *Zeitenwende* policies, such as the move to cap gas prices, Chancellor Scholz's trip to China, and expensive energy purchases. In particular, there has been open conflict between Economy Minister Robert Habeck from the Greens and Finance Minister Christian Lindner from FDP, with the former calling for an increase in tax revenues and the latter ruling out tax increases and intending to stick to Germany's constitutional debt brake. This is a constitutional

mechanism empowering the finance minister to restrict public spending to prevent structural budget deficits. Lindner has used this to limit the budgetary space to increase defence spending. This struggle is very likely to increase over the coming years (Mölling and Schütz, 2024).[6]

Even within his own party, Chancellor Scholz is having difficulties. Given that his bid for chancellor was only reluctantly supported by the SPD's left wing, he knows that his party has only remained united on the war due to the German public's strong support for Ukraine. Meanwhile, the party's left wing remains highly sceptical of any policy pivot and has yet to jettison its pacifist ideology. There is also a long history of pro-Russian sentiment in the party. Should support for Ukraine falter, as may very well happen if there are serious energy shortages and Ukraine is not that successful in fighting against Russia, Chancellor Scholz will be worried that old rifts will reopen within the party.

Germany has also been considered slow to implement Chancellor Scholz's decision to supply heavy arms to Ukraine, which reversed a long-standing policy not to send arms into combat zones. Experts have stated that there are now doubts in Ukraine, other EU countries, and the United States about promised German deliveries considering Berlin's repeated overpromising and underdelivering.

Zeitenwende currently seems to lack any European dimension. Germany's efforts to act jointly with the United States (e.g., on delivering Patriots and Leopards to Ukraine) suggest that it prefers to coordinate more closely with the United States than its European allies. This alignment leaves little room for European initiatives. Therefore, there is the perception that *Zeitenwende* has very much focused on restoring a solid relationship with the United States (after the difficult Trump years) rather than developing a robust European response. (Tenenbaum and Peria-Peigne, 2023).[7]

Many interviewees consider that the real test of *Zeitenwende* is the government's China policy. They therefore criticise how Germany's China policy has remained ambiguous as can be seen in Chart 4 below. While Chancellor Scholz has hesitated to dramatically change Germany's approach to China, he has been challenged by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and other officials from Scholz's Green and FDP coalition partners, who want a new cautiously assertive approach.

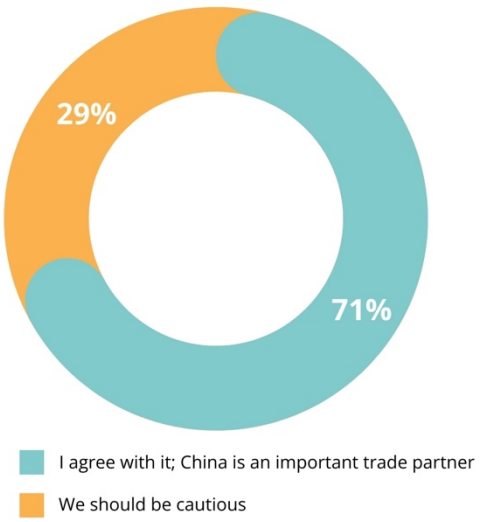


Chart 4: How do you see the government's position against China?

Analysis of National Security Strategy

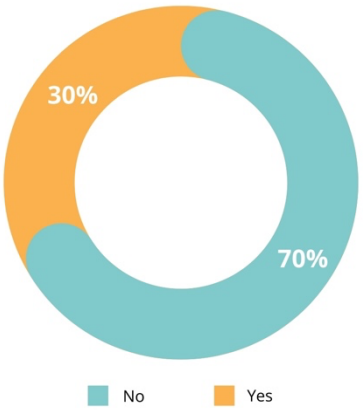


Chart 5: Do you think National Security Strategy is an adequate document that supports Zeitenwende?

The National Security Strategy published on June 14, 2023, aimed to answer the majority of the criticisms outlined above by providing greater clarity about Germany's defence commitments and implementation strategies.

Although previous German governments have produced policy documents covering security, the country has never had a dedicated comprehensive strategy. However, faced with such important foreign policy changes, German voters seemed to demand an emotional insurance policy before agreeing to anything new. Hence, the government prepared the new security strategy with this in mind.

Given that the National Security Strategy (NSS) enables reflection on *Zeitenwende*, it was also analysed through the interviewees. The following subsections report the perceived advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages of National Security Strategy

The interviewees found the document to be refreshing. Its authors deliberately avoid old slogans and ideas, such as *Wandel durch Handel* (change by means of commerce), *Wandel durch Verflechtung* (change through interconnection), civilian power, checkbook diplomacy, or military restraint. Besides, the paper introduces new concepts. Based on a recognition of new, complex threats affecting all areas of the state, society, and the economy, the government has implemented a policy of *Integrated Security*. This is actually a holistic approach to national security that goes beyond military preparedness and deterrence. Under the slogan "robust, resilient, sustainable," the document outlines the three guiding principles of Germany's integrated security strategy.

- Robust means being prepared to protect against attacks, including cyberattacks and hybrid warfare, meeting Germany's commitments to NATO, and investing in the *Bundeswehr*.
- Resilient signifies the country's commitment to upholding a liberal, rules-based domestic and international order through a values-based, interest-led foreign policy.
- Sustainable represents the need to ensure that Germany has the natural, economic and social resources it needs to prosper. [8]

Such a strategy normally aims to establish long-term objectives and provide a roadmap of short- and medium-term tactics to achieve them. However, although the NSS clearly lays out the geopolitical and economic challenges facing the country, it is currently too vague to be an effective guide. It lacks sufficient detail regarding tactics and concrete steps and fails to discuss some important issues. Thus, rather than providing a strategy, it seems to present a list of good intentions. Hence, a majority of interviewees did not consider it to be adequate as seen in Chart 5.

Chart 6 details the inadequacies as identified by the interviewees.

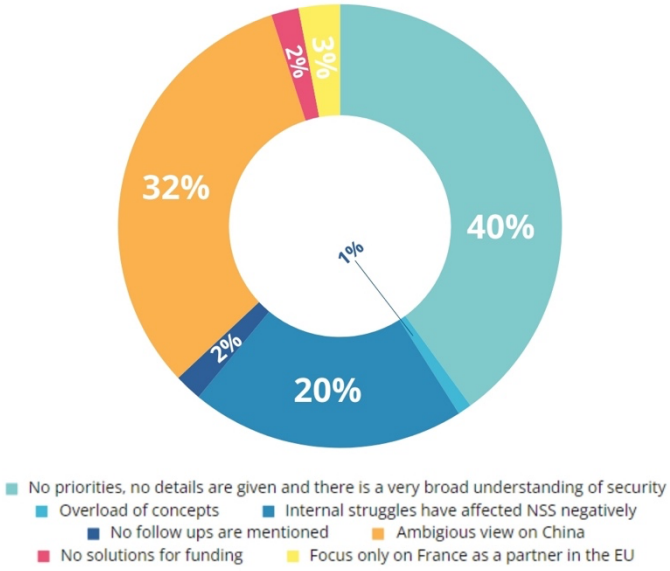


Chart 6: What is the most important problem in National Security Strategy?

Disadvantages of National Security Strategy

The NSS lacks any prioritisation. It promises to a*dvance, enhance, or strengthen* efforts across over 75 areas yet does not say which deserve the greatest attention.

"Nevertheless, Germany's first NSS is overall a good-faith effort at bridging the coalition's competing visions of the country's international role."

There is also a danger of overload while its conceptualisation of security is too broad to allow for any meaningful distinctions. To make Germany more *wehrhaft* (robust), the document promises actions in fields ranging from national and collective defence and civil preparedness to crisis engagement, development policy, and arms control, while making reassuring statements about Germany's commitment to the EU, NATO, and nuclear deterrence. There is a clear statement of support for a free, independent, and democratic Ukraine in its internationally recognized borders, and for EU enlargement to include Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans. However, little is new, much is vague, and, again, priorities are missing.

The document does not explain how its proposals will be funded. The debt brake is still considered as an important constraint on strengthening defence spending. Therefore the effective implementation of Germany's first NSS is still contingent on the current finance minister's willingness to provide the funds needed to achieve it.

There is no clear follow-up process after implementation or regular review system to force future governments to maintain the process at regular intervals.

Although Chancellor Scholz has emphasised the importance of partnerships with countries in the Global South, the document does not elaborate on how these partnerships should be designed and what opportunities they offer. Furthermore, though the NSS is very clear on the threat that Russia poses both for German and European security, it is ambivalent about China and provides few insights into the future direction of Germany's relations with China.

Despite declaring repeatedly that China is a competitor and systemic rival, the strategy still clearly views China as a partner because it remains the largest importer of German manufactured goods and is increasingly investing in domestic infrastructure projects, such as its recent purchase of part of the port of Hamburg (The Economist, June 2023). [9]

Regarding the relationship with Germany's EU partners, the NSS highlights Germany's special relationship with France as co-leaders within the EU and seeks a greater role for the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy in managing and preventing conflict internationally. Some of the interviewed experts criticised that by focusing only on France, Germany overlooks other European partners, e.g. Poland.

The NSS fundamentally reflects the compromise reached within the three-party coalition government. That is, it fell victim to political bargaining during its 15-month drafting process while it was no easy feat to agree on the strategy, given the many disagreements between Scholz's SDP, Baerbock's Greens, and Finance Minister Lindner's FDP on issues ranging from the China policy to sending weapons to Ukraine. The most contentious of these issues was the establishment of a National Security Council to centralise decision-making. Ultimately, this failed to materialise due to differences between the Chancellery and Foreign Ministry over concerns that it would upset the power balance between the chancellery and other ministries. This failure is further evidence that a more active, outward-looking agenda is likely to be frustrated by the domestic institutional arrangements established during the Bonn Republic. These are not well suited to the task of responding effectively to quick or dramatic international changes. Unfortunately, the strategy fails to acknowledge that it was the lack of coordination among key ministries and a weak central command that gave rise to Germany's deficient foreign and defence policies in the first place. Indeed, it may be difficult to translate the strategy into actionable policy without a body or structure like the envisaged National Security Council to effectively coordinate between multiple agencies.

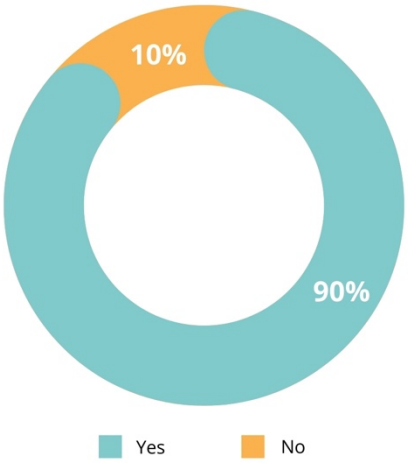


Chart 7: Is the public still supportive about the support of Germany in the war between Russia and Ukraine?

Nevertheless, Germany's first NSS is overall a good-faith effort at bridging the coalition's competing visions of the country's international role. At a minimum, it reflects a desire for Germany to respond to multiplying threats. However, the NSS often reads like a list of action items rather than a strategic document. It covers everything from Ms. Baerbock's emphasis on a feminist foreign policy to cyber and space issues, without truly detailing how they all connect to a larger vision and how the priorities will be fulfilled. Thus, it was not found to be an adequate document to enable Germany to meet the ambitious goals it has set for itself with *Zeitenwende.*

Like Merkel, Scholz is a politician who prefers to be led by polls. Hence, despite the failures and deficiencies outlined here, as long as the public continues to support *Zeitenwende*, Scholz will push for its greater implementation. Chart 7 below shows the continuity of the public support according to the interviewees.

Public opinion especially becomes important when we analyse the relationship between Germany and Türkiye and Türkiye's place in German foreign policy. Accordingly, the second part of this study analyses the influence of *Zeitenwende* on this relationship.

Empirical Research: Germany and Türkiye

Historical background

Formal relations between Türkiye and Germany date back to the 18th century, when the Ottoman Empire and Prussia signed the Friendship, Shipping, and Commerce Agreement, and the first Ottoman ambassador to Prussia, Ahmet Resmi Efendi, was assigned to Berlin in 1763. Military and economic cooperation between the two empires lasted well into World War I. The young Turkish Republic was also sympathetic to Germans and welcomed German scientists and professors fleeing from Nazi Germany. High-level visits and economic relations continued during the 1950s while Turkish workers started emigrating to Germany in 1961 under the labor agreement between the two countries. They stayed there and expanded, so that close to 3 million people with Turkish background currently live in Germany, over half of whom have German citizenship.

"The EU is the fruit of a Christian culture, therefore Türkiye is not fit for membership."

- Helmut Kohl

Problems started to increase after the end of the Cold War as Türkiye's geographic importance waned and its human rights record became more of an issue with German policy makers, specifically with Helmut Kohl's CDU/CSU government. In the 1997 Luxembourg European Council Summit, the EU accepted Central and Eastern European countries and Cyprus as candidates for full membership but excluded Türkiye. The Turkish Prime Minister at that time, Mesut Yılmaz, partly blamed the German government for this decision, arguing that the summit's outcome had been affected by Kohl's negative attitudes towards Türkiye and reminded his previous remarks that "the EU is the fruit of a Christian culture, therefore Türkiye is not fit for membership." This tension resulted in suspension of political dialogue between the EU and Türkiye until 1999 (Szymanski, 2007). [10]

At the end of 1990s Türkiye's role in mediation and peacekeeping efforts during crises in Nagorno-Karabakh, Bosnia, and Kosovo highlighted Türkiye's strategic importance in the security of the larger European geography. This in turn made Germany's Social Democrat-Green coalition government more sympathetic to Türkiye's EU membership bid between 1998 and 2005. In 1999, it even led to the EU naming Türkiye as a candidate county for the first time and then opening accession negotiations in 2005.

Following her election in 2005, Germany's new Chancellor, Angela Merkel, adhered to the principle of pacta sunt servanda (agreements must be kept) despite not being very favourable of Türkiye's membership bid. In 2010, however, she proposed a privileged partnership with Türkiye that excluded the prospect of full membership while positioning Türkiye as merely a strategic ally that cannot be ignored. This led to significant resentment and disappointment in Ankara because this position was in stark contrast to Türkiye's longstanding wish to become an EU member.

In early 2013, Germany adopted a more positive approach towards Türkiye's EU membership bid after the German-Turkish Strategic Dialogue Mechanism was launched and the CDU/ CSU's 2013 election manifesto dropped the privileged partnership concept. Then, in the summer of 2013, the Gezi protests erupted in Türkiye. After the government intervened violently, Germany unilaterally vetoed the opening of Chapter 22 accession negotiations talks with the Turkish government, which again caused a serious rift between Türkiye and Germany. Bilateral tensions eased only after Germany lifted its veto. Meanwhile, Türkiye's parliament changed Turkish election law to allow Turkish citizens

abroad to vote in referenda and presidential elections. Since then, the exportation of domestic political polarisation in Türkiye to countries hosting Turkish citizens has created serious problems for bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey (Nas, Keyman, Arısan, Eralp and Aydın-Düzgit, IPC Policy Brief 2022). [11]

The recent refugee crisis has also significantly affected German-Turkish relations. Europeans had mostly ignored the ongoing war in Syria until the refugees' tragedies became visible to the public eye and people fleeing from Syria became a problem that European policy makers could no longer ignore. However, despite several European Council resolutions and conclusions, the EU was unable to produce a refugee policy until Germany assumed leadership, and Merkel managed to externalise the refugee crisis beyond the EU's borders through the Türkiye-EU deal. As part of the deal with Ankara to help stem refugee flows, Merkel offered to revitalise Türkiye's accession and visa liberalisation processes. This also took Turkish-German relations in a new direction, specifically the start of interest-driven functional cooperation or transactionalism. A clear sign of the transactionality of Turkish-European relations was the EU's postponement of the latest Türkiye Progress Report until after Türkiye's general elections on November 1, 2015. This was a favour to Ankara for its gatekeeping role in the refugee crisis, given that the report severely criticised Türkiye for significant democratic backsliding (Paul, 2017). [12]

"Despite several European Council resolutions and conclusions, the EU was unable to produce a refugee policy until Germany assumed leadership, and Merkel managed to externalise the refugee crisis beyond the EU's borders through the Türkiye-EU deal. "

Relations deteriorated again following the failed coup attempt in Türkiye on July 15, 2016. The fact that no senior German official came to Türkiye to express solidarity in the days and weeks that followed was viewed particularly negatively. Things got more tense when before the 2017 presidential referendum in Türkiye, Turkish ministers' requests to visit Germany for campaign purposes was rejected by the German government. Germany considered this to be interference in German domestic affairs in that ministers' campaigning in Germany reflected Turkish government efforts to maintain its influence and instrumentalise Germany's Turkish community (calling on German Turks not to vote for mainstream parties, holding rallies in Germany, etc.). Furthermore, Germany was worried that polarization in Turkish society was being directly reflected in German domestic politics.

In her last years in government, Merkel's main objective was to contain the crisis in Türkiye-Germany-EU relations through functional cooperation/transactionalism, mainly on refugee issues and bilateral economic relations. Because transactionalism is largely based on short-term, interest-oriented exchanges between countries rather than engagement based on shared normative goals, Merkel's policy of transactionalism was also adopted by Türkiye's leadership. This enabled both sides to maintain the relationship and avoid the much-needed focus on democracy, rule of law, and human rights issues in Türkiye. The following section discusses in detail whether this policy has been adopted by Germany's current coalition government.

Current coalition government

The end of the Merkel era and the advent of the SPD-Greens-FDP coalition government in Germany formed in December 2021 has engendered critical shifts in Germany's political landscape because these three political parties differ in major dimensions from the more pragmatic policy orientation of Merkel's government. Their coalition agreement represents their consensus on the future of Germany. The new government has promoted the need for change to meet the challenges of multiple

crises facing both Germany and the EU with a new economic strategy based on a social-ecological market economy.

Merkel's disappearance from the political stage also ended that epoch of German-Turkish relations. Indeed, German political parties' views on Türkiye and Türkiye-EU relations are predictable once the parties' ideological stands are understood. For the time being, SPD remains the most popular party among German Turkish voters, it lost support, especially after the high-profile SPD member Sarrazin claimed in a controversial book published in 2010, that Turkish migrants were having negative effects on Germany's society and economy. Currently, the Social Democrats have seemingly maintained Merkel's muddling through policy in the sense that, although they are not openly against Türkiye's European ambitions, they are willing to ignore it. Their party program has adopted an open-ended approach that provides very small space for Türkiye.

The Greens are known to Turkish audiences since Cem Özdemir, a German MP of Turkish descent, was the party's co-chair from 2008 to 2018. The Greens, whose manifesto offers the most detail regarding Turkey, emphasise universal values like democracy, rule of law, and human rights, with an emphasis on women's rights and a strong civil society. They see Europe as a multicultural community and equate Europeanisation with democratisation and modernisation along with multicultural diversity. Hence, they are not against Türkiye continuing accession negotiations with the EU provided that it returns to the reform process to fulfil its membership conditions. The Greens are actually the central determinant of the degree of transactionalism in German-Turkish relations, because they hold three central ministries concerning transactional dialogue between Germany and Türkiye: the Foreign Office, the Ministry for Economic Affairs, and the Ministry for Environment.

Finally, the FDP, although categorically not against Türkiye's EU membership, would like to suspend or break off accession negotiations given the extent of democratic backsliding in the country. They propose an alternative framework based on security and economic cooperation.

"Although the coalition partners all agree that Türkiye is strategically very important for Germany, the coalition has agreed that no negotiation chapters will be opened or closed unless there is an improvement in the state of democracy in Türkiye."

The coalition agreement is quite clear in general in its negative stance on Türkiye's political and economic conditions, its EU membership prospects, and the revitalisation of the accession process. Although the coalition partners all agree that Türkiye is strategically very important for Germany, the coalition has agreed that no negotiation chapters will be opened or closed unless there is an improvement in the state of democracy in Türkiye. There is also no specific policy objective in the coalition agreement regarding the modernisation of the Customs Union or visa liberalisation (Nas, Keyman, Arısan, Eralp and Aydın-Düzgit, IPC Policy Brief 2022).[13]

The government also has to take note of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which received the most votes after the CDU/CSU and the SPD in the last elections. The AfD, which was founded only 7 months before the 2013 elections, first entered parliament in 2017. By 2019, the AfD was represented in all 16 states. In May 2016, it adopted an explicitly anti-Islam policy while its 2017 election manifesto had a section headed "Why Islam does not belong in Germany." The AfD is consistent in its exclusionary stance towards Türkiye: its election manifesto stated that only moderate Muslims who accept integration can be considered valued members of German society.

Effects of the Russia-Ukraine war and Zeitenwende on German-Turkish relations

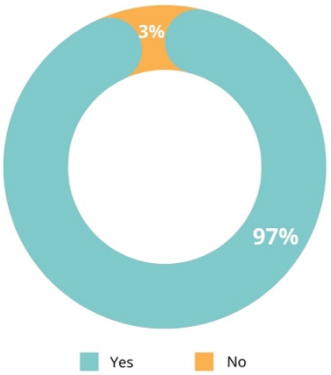


Chart 8: Has Zeitenwende also had an influence on German-Turkish relations?

Throughout this paper, we have discussed how Germany's new government has found itself in a rapidly changing geopolitical context with the onset of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 and how it has substantially increased its defence commitments by reversing its foreign and security policy. The interviewees confirmed, as can be seen from Chart 8, this has obviously necessitated a rethinking of relations with Türkiye.

Nevertheless, one must be cautious when analysing the influence of *Zeitenwende* on German-Turkish relations because the interviewees indicated that it did not go as far as supporting Türkiye's EU membership bid as shown in Chart 9.

Zeitenwende mainly entails paying attention more clearly to Germany's interests within a realist framework. This also necessitates being in dialogue with strategically important countries even if they do not share the same fundamental values. As Chart 10 shows, the interviewees identified Türkiye as a strategically important country in a number of respects.



Chart 9: In what ways do you think Zeitenwende influenced German-Turkish relations?

Currently, when you observe and speak to Germans you would find that majority of them are against Türkiye's EU accession and a substantial amount thinks that the government should take more decisive action against Türkiye. Nevertheless, relations between these two allies are complex and profound. Indeed, relations with Türkiye present a challenge for the new German government. Türkiye remains a major partner for Germany and Germany does not want to alienate Turks in Germany or risk further political escalation with Türkiye. As Türkiye's biggest trading partner, and home to 3 million people of Turkish origin, half of whom can vote in elections in Türkiye, Germany does not want to see the country's economy destroyed. Neither do the 7,000 or so German companies operating in Turkey. In addition, an unstable Türkiye may no longer abide by the agreement with the EU that currently keeps millions of refugees on its side of the Mediterranean. While it seems unlikely at this juncture that Türkiye will ever become an EU member, a majority of the interviewees agreed that the EU should not continue its lack of strategic investment in relations with Türkiye. Instead, Türkiye should be bonded to Germany and Europe as closely as possible. Charts 11 and 12 explain interviewees' perspectives on current state and potential future of Türkiye-EU relations and what they regard as problems for Türkiye's EU membership. (Nas, Keyman, Arısan, Eralp and Aydın-Düzgit, IPC Policy Brief 2022)[14]

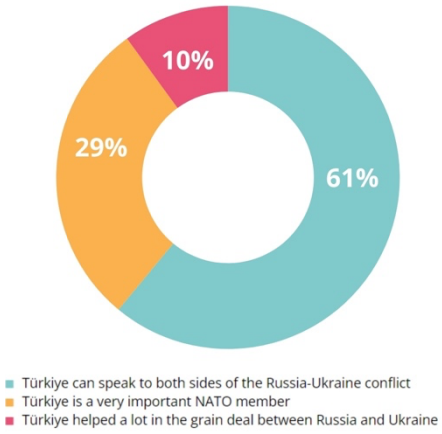


Chart 10: Why do you think Türkiye is strategically important?

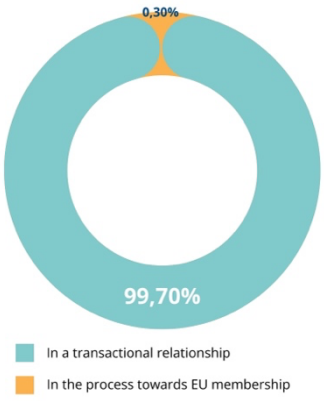


Chart 11: How do you see the evolution of Türkiye-Germany relations?

Given Türkiye's low EU membership prospects because of various problems, the best way for Germany to maintain relations with a strategically important country like Türkiye is by continuing a transactional relationship. For Germany, the most important component is that Türkiye prevents Middle East migrants from reaching Europe, thereby containing the security threat that they might bring, especially from Syria. Another important component is modernisation of the Customs Union Agreement between Türkiye and the EU, including liberalisation of agriculture, services, and public procurement, and adopting effective dispute resolution and trade policy consultation mechanisms. Germany's current coalition government has not agreed to start such talks due to concerns about the efficiency of democratic practices and tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean with two EU members: Greece and Cyprus. The Customs Union modernisation goal re-emerged within the framework of the Positive Agenda proposed by the European Council in 2020 to ease tension and engage with Türkiye. However, negotiations could not be started due to problems regarding the extension of the Customs Union to all member states and trade irritants in the current functioning of the Customs Union (Nas, Keyman, Arısan, Eralp and Aydın-Düzgit, IPC Policy Brief 2022). [15] It was stated by several interviewees that the German government may take an active role in this respect to create a common perspective within the EU to revitalise Türkiye-EU relations by initiating formal negotiations for the modernisation of the Customs Union. This could significantly upgrade trade and economic relations and establish a rules-based economy in Türkiye. The important components of the transactional relationship between two countries from the interviewees' perspectives can be seen in Chart 13.

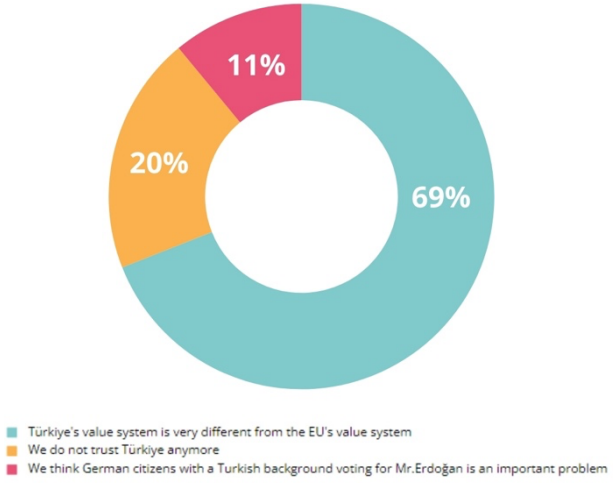


Chart 12: What do you think are the main obstacles for Türkiye's EU membership?

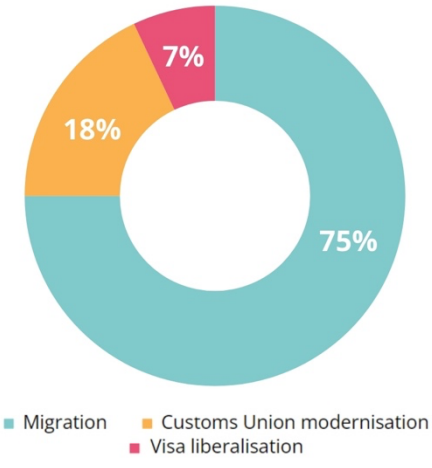


Chart 13: What do you think is the most important component in a transactional relationship between Germany and Türkiye?

Conclusion

"What is important for securing the peace in Europe is needed, will be done."
- Chancellor Scholz

For decades, Germany relied on the United States and NATO for protection with a seemingly never-ending peace dividend that enabled the country to champion military restraint while maintaining the illusion that the world was more peaceful and secure than it was. Even after reunification, Germany still failed to adequately resource its defence capabilities, continuing to outsource these responsibilities to the United States and NATO. In recent years, Germany has also strengthened political and economic ties with Russia, in line with a decades long "Ostpolitik" (Eastern policy), which began as a bridge to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The SDP, in particular, has long advocated for this approach as a key tenet of German foreign policy, although other German chancellors, including most recently Angela Merkel, have also argued that stability partly depends on relations with Russia, especially through trade and commercial ties. This has generated frustration amongst Germany's allies, who have often criticised it because of its refusal to pull its weight in the geopolitical space and ignoring the realities of a degraded security environment. Hence, the current coalition's mission to reshape German national security through *Zeitenwende* was met with enthusiastic optimism.

By the time Russia invaded Ukraine, Putin had an iron grip on Germany's natural-gas supply, so *Zeitenwende* is resoundingly clear in declaring that "today's Russia is for now the most significant threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area." Based on this stance, it vowed to cut all the ties with Russia, meet the 2% GDP defence target for NATO members, and create an additional budget of 100 billion euros for strengthening the Bundeswehr.

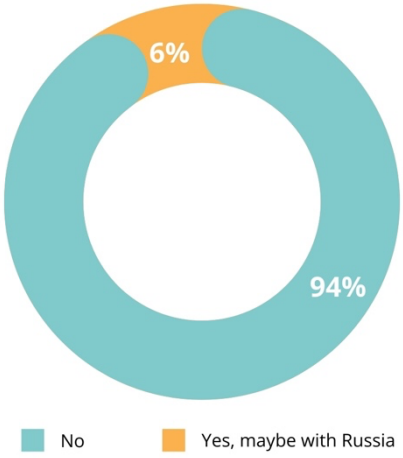


Chart 14: Do you expect a return to how foreign policy was practiced before Zeitenwende?

The study reported here explored the most important topics and debates surrounding *Zeitenwende* and offered space for sharing a diverse set of voices on how Germany can better position itself in this rapidly changing world. More specifically it addressed a number of questions regarding the new policy by seeking answers from German experts from academia, civil society and politics: What is really different about this *Zeitenwende*? Can it achieve its goals? How can Germany shape a secure future in and outside of Europe through *Zeitenwende*? What does it take for Germany to preserve peace and prosperity at home and foster greater strategic engagement abroad? The answers were many but as shown in Chart 14 one thing was certain: the world had changed and so did Germany's position in it and there was no turning back.

Once it became clear that the German government's comprehensive, change oriented *Zeitenwende* plan would not be abandoned, a critical question was whether this orientation would affect its relations with Türkiye and, if so, how? Would this change lead to a rules-based relationship with support for potential EU membership or would the coalition partners continue functional co-operation, i.e., the transactional relationship, long favoured by leaders in both countries? Some segments of Turkish society had raised expectations that Germany's three-party coalition would focus more on rules-based policies. Their hopes had increased given current developments, both internationally and in the domestic politics of Germany and Türkiye, and the new importance given to defence and security issues triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war. However, the research showed that there is no overtly positive policy orientation within the German government regarding Türkiye's EU membership bid.

Zeitenwende brought out the division between values and interests within a transactional relationship, with some rhetorical adjustments. However, given the hurdles standing in the way of EU enlargement, this may not necessarily be a disadvantageous position for the moment.

The research findings also indicated the need for people-to-people contacts between Germany and Türkiye and more dialogue between German and Turkish civil society groups and local actors which could surface out the strong points in the relationship. This could lead to a more beneficial migration agreement or modernisation of the Customs Union. Civil society may play a critical role in achieving a breakthrough in the stalemate in Turkey-EU relations and enable progress towards greater coordination and integration. Nevertheless, the EU accession process is still the most effective means to anchor Türkiye within the European and transatlantic framework and to move Turkey forward in its democracy at home and multilateral orientation globally. Whether it has to be done through a functional co-operation or a transactional relationship, it will be done. After all, Germany is an important anchor in Türkiye's EU orientation and transatlantic relations. Germany is also the most important country, even more now through *Zeitenwende*, in terms of the benefits from keeping a democratic Türkiye anchored in the EU.

ANNEX : List of interviewees

Members of the Parliament:

Social Democratic Party (SPD)

- Aydan Özoğuz
- Dr. Joe Weingarten
- Falko Drossmann
- Mehmet Ali Takis
- Hakan Demir
- Macit Karaahmetoğlu
- Ralf Stegner
- Jürgen Coss
- Nils Schmid
- Kristian Klinck
- Christoph Schmid
- Frank Schwabe

Christian Democratic Union (CDU)

- Armin Schwarz
- Dr. Katia Leikert
- Knut Abraham
- Thomas Röwekamp
- Dr. Norbert Röttgen
- Christoph Ploss
- Manfred Grund

Christian Social Union (CSU)

- Alexander Radwan
- Thomas Erndl
- Tobias Winkler

Free Democratic Party (FDP)

- Ulrich Lechte
- Alexander Müller
- Thomas Hacker
- Gyde Jensen

Bündnis 90/Die Grünen

- Max Lucks
- Filiz Polat
- Sara Nanni

Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)

- Gerold Otten

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Tjörven Bellmann (Political Director)
- Daniel Ricco (Türkiye Division)
- Lena Handwerk (NATO Division)

Ministry of Defence
- Torben Jürgensen

Federal Chancellery
- Alexander Eberl

Experts
- Dr. Christina Catherine Krause (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung)
- Dr. Stefan Mair (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Barbara Lippert (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Jens Bastian (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Margerete Klein (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Andrea Schmitz (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Sabine Fischer (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Daria Isachenko (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Dr. Pia Fuhrtop ((Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik-SWP)
- Ambassador Rolf Nikel (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswaertige Politik-DGAP)
- Guntram Wolff (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswaertige Politik-DGAP)
- Dr. Stefan Meister (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswaertige Politik-DGAP)
- Dr. Aylin Matle (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswaertige Politik-DGAP)
- Ambassador Ekkehard Brose (Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik-BAKS)
- Joseph Sattler, Expert on Türkiye and advisor to Aydan Özoğuz and Nils Schmid (SPD)
- Franz Xaver Mauerer, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to CDU/CSU
- Katharina Scheuerer , Foreign Policy Advisor to Thomas Erndl (CDU/CSU)
- Henning Speck, National Security Advisor to CDU/CSU
- Dr. Ekrem Eddy Güzeldere (Berghof Foundation)
- Dr. Stormy-Annika Mildner (Executive Director, Aspen Institute)
- Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff (German Marshall Fund)
- Sudha David- Wilp (German Marshall Fund)
- Nora Müller (Körber Stftung)
- Flora Cresswell (Transparency International)
- Dr. Daniel Eriksson (Transparency International)
- Bernd Hüttemann (Transparency International and European Movement Germany)
- Dr. Claudia Matthes (Humboldt University)
- Prof. Dr. Christine Reh (Hertie School)
- Prof. Dr. Patrick Sensburg (University of Applied Sciences for Police and Public Administration)
- Kenan Kolat (Türkisch-Deutsche Gemeinde zu Berlin)

Members of Bundesrat
- Tuba Bozkurt (Greens)

Media
- Tina Hassel (Editor in Chief, ARD Hauptstadtstudio)
- Claudia Buckenmaier (Correspondent, ARD Hauptstadtstudio)
- Ahmet Külahçı (Hürriyet)

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