



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Angela Merkel's gift to the Russian war narrative



If Angela Merkel had remained German chancellor, would there have been Russian aggression against Ukraine? Probably the same thing would have happened, but after Mrs. Merkel's interview with Die Zeit, this question deserves a much more serious answer than if it had been raised before this interview. Angela Merkel has the opportunity to try to change the perception of her statement to Die Zeit. She said that the West wanted to buy more time for Ukraine to prepare for the conflict with Russia with the Minsk agreements. Her interview caused surprise, although there was no official reaction in the West.

In Russia, the reaction was a mixture of theatrical anger and genuine satisfaction. The former chancellor can soften her position, say that she was misunderstood and underline that she meant strengthening Ukraine's capacity to become a member of NATO, because that is what she spoke about for Die Zeit, and not about preparing for war against Russia. But, for that she will need to do another interview, and above all, convey a desire to rectify herself, which is very unlikely. Even if she denies it, the perception that the West "had betrayed Russia" with the Minsk agreements will continue to circulate, as Vladimir Putin stated, reacting to Angela Merkel's statement. As ever, the importance and problems with Angela Merkel's position is not at the level of interpreting the meaning of her words.

This is about the true role of her policy in creating an environment in which Russian aggression against Ukraine could become a reality. It is also about her role in determining the possible future direction of the war. Indeed, the most powerful woman in world politics in the last 15 years, although retired, seems to have that power.

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To really find out whether Angela Merkel is

telling the truth when she said that the Minsk agreements were intended to buy time for Ukraine to prepare for a conflict with Russia, we should pay attention to what her partners said when they negotiated the agreement. Primarily François Hollande, but also Barack Obama and David Cameron, for example.

It is possible that Merkel is speaking on their behalf now, but it is more likely that she is only talking about her motives from 2014 and 2015, when the agreements were signed in Minsk. And it is even more likely that she is not talking about the past at all, but that by interpreting an event from the past, she is actually aiming to change the current situation, and especially the future development of events in Ukraine. So far, she has had a lot of success in this. Moscow reacted angrily to her words.

Putin said he was "disappointed" by Merkel's comments. His accomplice in the aggression, Alexander Lukashenko, former host of the peace talks, says that Merkel's confession is "disgusting". "If it had happened as she says it happened, it's disgusting. But it's not. And the way it really is not just disgusting. It's vile. From Merkel I didn't expect this, and the President of Russia said that he did not expect such an attack from Angela Merkel. She acted in a petty way, a nasty way. She wants to be trendy."

The real feeling that prevailed in the Kremlin after Angela Merkel's interview is a sense of moral victory

However, this kind of shock at the top of the Russian war campaign is just for show. The real feeling that prevailed in the Kremlin after Angela Merkel's interview is a sense of moral victory due to the confirmation of the rightness of the attack on Ukraine. The head of the Parliament (Duma), Vlacheslav Volodin, stated that "after Merkel's confession, Germany and France bear moral and material responsibility for what is happening in Ukraine; they must pay compensation to residents of Donbass region for 8 years of

genocide and damage”.

Angela Merkel is too experienced and cautious a politician to make a mistake and say something she doesn't mean. She could also very well foresee the reaction her words about the true motives of the Minsk agreements would cause, that is, that the Kremlin would use that "material" to make a defensive fortification of propaganda it desperately needed from the very beginning of the invasion of Ukraine. If Angela Merkel's motives towards Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression were truly sincere, she would have refrained from such a comment regarding the Minsk agreements. In this way, she supported the Russian invasion narrative, according to which the intervention in Ukraine was forced, because all possibilities to protect its population in the eastern regions of Ukraine "from genocide" had previously been exhausted. Angela Merkel, in fact, gave her support for the Russian casus belli, and this is something that Putin has been waiting for almost ten months and finally got.

Mrs. Merkel's policy has dominantly shaped disunity in both the EU and NATO regarding relations with Putin's Russia

Bearing this in mind, and if we also note that Merkel still regrets stopping the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, we raise the initial question - would Putin really have attacked Ukraine if Angela Merkel were still in power in Berlin? In such a situation, Europe would still be under the dominant influence of Berlin, especially its openness to continue to follow the line of compromise with Putin, rather than opposition.

This would further make Europe frustrated by its collective inability to match such a relationship, while at the same time under pressure from the US and the UK to be tougher and more decisive towards Moscow. Merkel managed to relieve that pressure, even during the "hardest" days for Euro-Atlantic relations, when Donald Trump ultimately demanded that everyone allocate 2% of GDP

for defence or they would turn their backs on NATO. Ultimately, in relation to Moscow, her policy has dominantly shaped disunity in both the EU and NATO regarding relations with Putin's Russia.

In such an environment, why would Putin reach for an expensive, risky and, as it will turn out, long-term action in Ukraine, if opposite him, as the main competitor, he has a disunited and ineffective West, in which one of the main representatives is a politician with a highly developed ear for Moscow's interests? This does not mean that Angela Merkel will soon appear on the board of one of the Russian oil and gas or metallurgy state giants, as it has happened with one of her predecessors, Gerhard Schroeder. Her career and her leadership go much further than that. Nevertheless, by defending her policy at the time of creating an environment for aggression against Ukraine, which followed immediately after her retirement, Merkel has contributed to the chances of the outcome of the war. Regrettably, probably fulfilling her earlier commitments.