



By: The Editorial Board

Angela Merkel and Eastern Europe – from an illusion of dialogue to the policy of deterrence



Angela Merkel's statement in an interview with the Hungarian Partizán **provoked** strong reactions in several European countries, particularly in those that had warned from the outset against misjudging Moscow and Putin.

Her remark that "Baltic countries and Poland" in 2021 rejected her attempt to launch a new EU dialogue with Vladimir Putin was received in the east of the continent as a moral blow rather than a political analysis.

The reactions are not merely a matter of wounded pride but an accurate diagnosis of the European division: a conflict between those who still believe that Moscow must be engaged in dialogue and those who have learned that each new round of "dialogue" precedes the next war.

In the interview, Merkel said that, in the final year of her mandate, she tried to revive the "EU-Putin" format, together with Emmanuel Macron. The idea was to reposition Europe as an independent mediator, not as a conduit for American policy.

However, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia refused, warning that such a meeting would send the wrong signal to the Kremlin, which was already openly moving troops towards the Ukrainian border. The European Council rejected the proposal.

A lack or a misuse of dialogue?

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, Merkel described that moment as a missed opportunity for de-escalation. However, it is precisely in this interpretation that the reason for the current dispute lies.

Poland and the Baltic states argue the war in Ukraine was caused by misuse, not a lack of dialogue. According to them, the Kremlin used every European hand extended under the slogan "Let us talk" as proof of the West's weakness, not as a gesture of reason.

Merkel now claims that a "higher level of communication" might have kept Putin within

the framework of the agreement — a view those countries see as an attempt to relativise historical responsibility.

Poland's response was direct and clear. Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski **stated** that Angela Merkel's claim "is as true as when she said no one from Central Europe protested against Nord Stream."

"There is no justification for Russia's aggression" - Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna

He added that "Mrs Merkel has forgotten" how Poland and other countries warned as early as 2007 about the dangers of bilateral agreements with Russia, and that Europe cannot absolve itself by claiming that "more talks" would change Putin's decision.

In Lithuania, the **reaction** was almost unanimous. Linas Linkevičius, former foreign minister, said that Merkel "missed an opportunity to be quiet." Gabrielius Landsbergis, also a former foreign minister, described her words as "a case of inverted logic" and an attempt to "find someone else to blame".

Remigijus Motuzas, Chair of the Seimas Committee on Foreign Affairs, stated that Merkel's opinion does not represent the official position of the German government and that Lithuania firmly maintains the position that the only culprit is Russia, which is the aggressor.

The reaction was particularly sharp in Estonia. The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament, Marko Mihkelson, **called** Merkel's remarks "a disappointing low", saying it was "unacceptable to shift the responsibility for Russian imperial aggression to Poland and the Baltic countries."

Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna added that "there is no justification for Russia's aggression" and that "any attempt to mitigate Russia's responsibility is wrong and dangerous."

A pragmatic abandonment of illusions

Viewed objectively, without ideological bias, Merkel's 2021 attempt reflected the same logic that had shaped her politics since the early 2000s – the belief that stability is achieved through economic and political ties with Moscow, not deterrence.

However, she later **admitted** that Putin only recognises power, not dialogue. Today, that contradiction belongs to the past of German politics rather than the present, as under Friedrich Merz, Berlin has clearly adopted a harder line and established stable relations with the eastern members of the EU.

Under Friedrich Merz, Germany has clearly renounced its previous policy towards Russia. Instead of the former "Ostpolitik"—the German concept of rapprochement and dialogue with Moscow—it is now developing a strategy based on deterrence, strengthening the armed forces, and closer ties with the eastern members of the EU and NATO.

While the Western members are still weighing their interests, Poland and the Baltic states understand that security is a matter of survival

Although there is still mention of "channels of communication" in Berlin, the actual policy is a pragmatic abandonment of the illusion that the Kremlin can be changed through dialogue. This is why Merkel's interview, although personal, carries political weight—it comes from a country that is now decisively moving away from the policies she shaped for years.

Poland and the Baltic states not only challenge Merkel's account of events in 2021 but also confirm a new reality in which Eastern Europe plays a significant role. Their tone is not emotional but grounded in experience—while the Western members are still weighing their interests, they understand that security is a matter of survival.

A union without a common understanding of its past

This dispute is therefore not merely a technical discussion about the past but a reflection of the current state of Europe. Merkel has **reopened** the issue that divides European governments: whether security should be built solely through dialogue or through deterrence.

Today's Europe no longer has room for that debate; it must maintain communication channels and invest significantly in real defence capabilities.

Merkel is no longer in office, but her statements continue to divide Europe

While the public **discusses** Merkel's words, a new reality is already taking shape in the background: a wall of drones along the border, the joint procurement of ammunition, and plans to use frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine's defence. In practice, Europe is responding to what Merkel was still trying to grasp in theory.

The most interesting aspect of this episode is not the controversy itself, but the fact that it has revealed the true balance of power within the EU. Merkel is no longer in office, but her statements continue to divide Europe. The very fact that they have provoked such a reaction shows that the Union still lacks a common understanding of its own past or its policy towards Russia.

Europe faces the consequences of its decisions, not 'missed talks'

At a time when the war in Ukraine has become a gruelling test of endurance and US support has grown uncertain, Merkel's voice serves as a reminder of how much Europe still lacks a unified instinct.

She speaks the language of politics that believed time and trade would change Russia. Poland and the Baltic states respond in the language of history, which knows that Russia only changes its borders, not itself.



Today, Europe depends on the balance between the determination of its eastern members and the willingness of the rest of the Union to accept this reality as a shared one – Friedrich Merz with Kaja Kallas

Today, Europe depends on the balance between the determination of its eastern members and the willingness of the rest of the Union to accept this reality as a shared one. Only in this way can it develop a policy that does not oscillate between caution and hesitation.

Merkel's interview does not alter the course of the war, but it reminds Europe how easily it can lose clarity. If in 2014 she believed that the "dialogue format" would restrain Putin, in 2025 she knows that conversation is meaningful only when the interlocutor understands the limits of force.

Ultimately, the storm in the east of the continent was caused not only by the tone of the former chancellor but also by a message that is all too familiar: the idea that Europe could have acted differently, that an opportunity was missed, and that mistakes were made because there was not enough faith in dialogue.

Those statements in 2025 sound like a return to a time when illusions about Russia were considered strategies.

Today, Europe faces the consequences of its

decisions, not "missed talks". The debate surrounding Merkel revealed where the line of understanding lies—between those who underestimated the Russian strategy for years and those who recognised it in time.

Poland and the Baltic countries do not stand in opposition to Europe but are at its centre because they were the first to understand the nature of the threat the continent still faces.