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The *Zeitenwende* in German security policy. The Chancellor, coalition parties, and the Christian Democrats debate

The scope of change

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced radical changes to German foreign and security policy in a speech delivered to the *Bundestag* on 27 February 2022 (PP DB 20/19 2022: 1350)¹ as a reaction to the initiation of Russian military aggression against Ukraine. This has given rise to numerous discussions in the arena of German public opinion. It also set clear expectations among Germany's allies and partners, who count on Berlin's committed approach to the war in Ukraine. Both the German political class and broader German society were concerned about the multifaceted nature of the changes announced, as well as the need to re-evaluate the assumptions of the then current policy and caution towards military matters. Calls for a critical reckoning with the achievements of *Ostpolitik* and public discussions and disputes concerning this new course meant that the *Zeitenwende*² was strongly dependent on building political support to legitimise the actions taken.

The general perception of the term *Zeitenwende* used by the chancellor was that it signalled a breakthrough, a fundamental turning point in the history of Europe and the world. The root of this compound noun was directly associated with another, earlier key phrase in the postwar history of Germany. The

¹ PP DB, listed in bibliography as "Plenarprotokoll Deutscher Bundestag (Plenary Protocol of the German Bundestag).

² *Zeitenwende*, named the German word of the year in 2022 (*Zeitenwende amid...*), can be translated in various ways, such as 'changing of the times', 'turning point', or 'epochal shift'. The official translation of Scholz's speech refers to a 'watershed era' (*Policy statement...*). In this article the original German is used throughout.

word *Wende* defined the political turn in the German Democratic Republic in 1989-1990, consisting of a retreat from communism and the adoption by East German society of a course to regain German unity and accept democratic changes. The *Zeitenwende* therefore suggested the announcement of a fundamental change in German policy. However, in reality, the Chancellor did not put the issue in such a literal way. He merely said:

“We are living through a watershed era. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before. The issue at the heart of this is whether power is allowed to prevail over the law; whether we permit Putin to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century and the age of the great powers. Or whether we have it in us to keep warmongers like Putin in check” (PP DB 20/19 2022: 1350).

Therefore, Scholz reserved this phrase more to describe international changes brought about by Russian aggression, a return to the era of confrontation and deepening divisions between Russia and the West, between the world of democracy and the world of dictatorship and totalitarianism. However, since he announced specific changes in Germany's position in his speech, the concept of *Zeitenwende* was involuntarily assigned to German politics and became the emblem of this new chapter.

According to the assumptions of realism in international relations, the announcement of such changes should mean that they will translate into a more influential role for Germany within Europe, manifested by attempts to regenerate its own defence policy and providing strong support to Ukraine, especially by taking the initiative in this matter among Western countries. Germany should ensure key leadership not only on the issue of Ukraine, but also on broader EU security challenges and, more broadly, on restructuring relations between the West and Russia, and as a global power, to work to overcome growing divisions with the global South and restore the credibility of the Western-led order (Ischinger 2022).

Although the *Zeitenwende* is essentially a test of German foreign and security policy in the context of its alliances, judging by its complicated course to date, it represents an even greater challenge within the German domestic political context. Stormy discussions and strong differences of opinion both between the government and the opposition, and within the parties forming the coalition, especially within the *SPD*, indicated that Scholz's proposals were not based on broader assumptions developed on the basis of an internal agreement. Making up for this deficiency was crucial to the success of the changes announced. Their effectiveness depended on agreement within an experimental government coalition consisting, for the first time in history, of three par-

ties, on the Chancellor securing support within the government, and, above all, on convincing opponents on the left wing of the *SPD* on the utility of his plans, as well as on a pragmatic reorientation among the Greens. Because the core of changes in foreign and security policy and in the field of energy was a challenge to the core program elements of the second party representing the left. It was unknown whether and to what extent the *SPD* and Green electorates would be willing to accept the changes and consider them a necessary action in the face of the war in Ukraine. On the other hand, due to the scale of the changes announced, the success of the *Zeitenwende* depended on the creation of a cross-party consensus that included the Christian Democrats, although not more extreme opposition parties such as *AfD* and *Die Linke*.

First, it should be noted that the intention to change German policy announced by the Chancellor was not the result of a prepared strategic plan or extensive strategic reflection, but rather of shock and the unexpected realisation that Russian aggression could result in unpredictable risks for Germany. Continuing the assumptions of the previous attitude towards Russia in the field of energy and a conservative defence policy could weaken Germany vis a vis the US and other allies, as well as have a destructive effect on cooperation within the Alliance and the EU in a time of unprecedented challenges. Therefore, the dramatically changing situation revealed the incompatibility of the German position in the allied context. Although President Biden's administration wanted to maintain close, newly developed relations with Berlin and counted on a gradual adaptation of the approach of Chancellor Scholz and the "traffic light" coalition regarding increases in defence spending and taking on the burden of aid for Ukraine, no dramatic exacerbations or attempts to put direct pressure on Berlin could be observed. Chancellor Scholz delayed decisions on military support for Ukraine, focusing more on public opinion and many polarising parliamentary debates.

This intention to make changes to German security policy appeared unexpectedly and therefore could not immediately gain broad support within the ranks of the coalition. The difficulties included poorly established and diversified assessments by the general public and political elites, especially on the *SPD* side, as to actual intentions of Russia, its imperial tendencies and efforts to revise the post-Cold War order, and, over time, also divergences in assessing the implications for Germany of the new western strategy to contain Russia.

The case of changes in German policy, characterised by internal political perturbations in the context of establishing a new course, leads to speculation whether an explanation of this type of state behaviour should take into account the complex, "internal" structure of the state's agency in international relations.

Such a structure should include the ability of the decision-making centre to mobilise internal resources and at the same time consolidate its own concepts in the internal environment in the face of sudden and dramatic international challenges. At the same time, the international (allied) context may be used as a source of justification for the choices made by decision-makers rather than being a driving force for change.³

In order to clarify the position of Chancellor Scholz and his decision-making centre (composed of the Chancellor's Office and the Federal Ministry of Defence) regarding a permanent increase in defence spending and Germany's ambivalent involvement in the supply of arms to Ukraine, the key question concerns the possibilities and limitations in building the political consensus necessary for implementing changes. This factor seems to determine the level of success of the *Zeitenwende* due to the aforementioned unique structure of the ruling coalition, composed of parties with clearly different approaches to defence and security issues.

Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the ambivalent nature of the German position on defence spending and especially aid for Ukraine, more than the expectations of the US administration, was determined by the internal context, that is the limited ability of the decision-making centre to build broader supra-coalition support and to manage tensions at the same time. These failures resulted, on the one hand, from the pressure of the *CDU/CSU* to increase defence spending and supplies of heavy weapons to Ukraine and, on the other hand, from the deepening differences in the coalition between the supporters of adaptation (the Greens and the *FDP*) and their opponents from the left pacifist wing of the *SPD*.

To verify this hypothesis, it is possible to propose an analysis of both of the main areas of the *Zeitenwende* (defence spending and military support for Ukraine), in a tripartite frame of reference between the decision-making centre and the coalition base, and the main opposition force, that is the *CDU/CSU*. The unique role of the centre was supported by important instruments that made it possible for it to have a dominant influence on shaping changes.

³ The proposed theoretical point of view, focused on the actor's perspective, does not depreciate the importance of international factors for the formation of the *Zeitenwende*, that is among others: the persuasion that has been going on for several years on the part of the US and other allies and partners to reduce German energy dependence on Russia, increase defence spending in line with Allied guidelines, or provide support to Ukraine in the form of supplies of heavy weapons after 24 February 2022. However, if the alliance were to be a source of changes in German behaviour, then a more typical "realistic" reaction should be observed in the form of taking over a leadership role.

The Chancellery has considerable power in the field of defence policy (as part of its constitutionally established competence to issue directives, known as *Richtlinienkompetenz*), as well as in the field of arms exports, as it heads the Federal Security Council. However, the Federal Ministry of Defence exercises authority over the armed forces in times of peace. The Minister of Defence has influence on arms exports as a member of the Federal Security Council. The remaining coalition partners did not have similar opportunities to exert any influence. Nonetheless the Greens had the opportunity to learn about the motives behind the Chancellor's actions, through two leading politicians, Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck, who heads the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action, which issues permits for arms companies to export weapons, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock (also a member of the Federal Security Council and responsible for giving opinions on the political situation in countries importing arms). However, the role of the *FDP*, due to the leader Christian Lindner, in charge of the Ministry of Finance, was crucial for the implementation of the *Zeitenwende* in terms of ensuring an increase in defence spending.

Defence policy and spending increases

For years, the main bone of contention in relations with the US has been Germany's avoidance of financing allied defence expenditures adequate to its political and economic potential. The commitment to increase defence spending by the member states of the North Atlantic Alliance made at the summit in Wales in 2014 was implemented by the governments of the *CDU/CSU-SPD* coalition under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel only partially and with great resistance, and the deadline of 2024 for reaching the 2% of GDP level of funding seemed unattainable. The chronic underfinancing of the *Bundeswehr*, failed attempts to modernise it and delayed arms purchases undertaken after the Russian invasion against Ukraine in 2014 were the result of complex structural and budgetary conditions (Becker, Mölling 2021: 2-4), and above all, insufficient political will of both coalition parties and the decision-making centre (the Chancellor's office and the Ministry of Finance), avoiding projects that would polarise both the governing coalition and public opinion.⁴

⁴ Although in absolute numbers defence spending has increased successively (in 2014: EUR 33.4 billion, in 2019: EUR 43.2 billion, in 2022: EUR 50.4 billion), but these amounts in relation to GDP in the years 2014-2022 have not changed much (in 2014 it was a 1.15% share of GDP, and in 2022, 1.39% of GDP (Übelmesser 2023: 20).

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement on 27 February 2022 to increase defence spending to 2% of GDP was therefore a break with previous practice. He proposed establishing a Special Fund (*Sondervermögen*) to finance the *Bundeswehr* and embedding this in the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*). This was necessary to ensure financing of the Fund on the basis of loans in order to avoid violating the debt brake under Art. 115. Scholz's plan marked a radical departure from the delayed treatment of defence matters.

The agreement between the coalition parties and the Christian Democrats was confirmed in the *Bundestag* on 3 June 2022 (PP DB 20/42 2022), when the Basic Law was amended by supplementing it with a section of Art. 87 authorising the federation to establish a Fund and to take out loans in the amount of EUR 100 billion (Drs. DB 20/1409)⁵, and then an act was passed establishing a Special Fund for the *Bundeswehr* to finance arms and equipment projects until 2027 (Drs. DB 20/2090).

The real determination behind the intention to fund the *Bundeswehr* permanently at the level of 2% of GDP was called into question just one year after the establishment of the Fund, when the detailed plan for defence expenditures of the federal budget for 2024 (Einzelplan 14, hereinafter EP14) lacked a sufficient increase in defence spending that would reflect the intention to ensure their permanent increase, including after the expiration of the Fund's resources after 2027. The total for defence expenditures for 2024 in EP 14 is projected at a level of approximately EUR 51.95 billion (an increase of EUR 1.72 billion compared to 2023), and expenditures from the Fund amounted to EUR 19.8 billion (in 2023 this was only EUR 8.41 billion), which meant that for the first time in German history defence spending achieved a record (Bundeshaushaltsplan 2024 Einzelplan 14, 2023: 5, 71). However, the slight increase in the EP 14 budget with only EUR 1.72 billion contrasted with earlier announcements of a systematic increase in defence spending. Meanwhile, in order to meet the NATO goal of 2% of GDP, a total of about EUR 85.5 billion had to be allocated to defence in 2024. With EUR 51.95 billion in the budget (EP 14) and EUR 19.8 billion from the Fund, the shortfall in the calculation of the NATO recommendation was in practice supplemented with items from outside the ministry's budget plan (Bardt 2023: 5), as well as the shares from other ministries of approximately 13% of the value of the EP 14 budget (Hellmonds, Mölling, Schütz, 2023: 6), and the amount of approximately EUR 8 billion for military aid to Ukraine under Specific Plan 60) (Meyer 2023: 12). Only thanks to these con-

⁵ Drs. DB, listed in bibliography as "Drucksachen Deutscher Bundestag" (Printed matter of the German *Bundestag*).

troversial accounting manoeuvres will Germany show an indicator of 2.12% of GDP for 2024 and meet the NATO requirement (Seibel 2023, Gebauer, Kormbaki 2024).

The expansion of large scale defence spending through the Fund had important implications. This instrument caused decision-makers to postpone the need to increase spending in the federal budget itself (EP 14). On the other hand, intra-ministerial calculations from January 2024 showed that after the resources from the Fund are exhausted in 2028, there will be a shortage of EUR 56 billion for continued spending at the level of 2% of GDP and for the continuation of large arms projects (this deficit results from the difference between the estimated amount of needs in 2028 of EUR 107.8 billion and a fixed amount of expenses in the regular budget of EUR 51.9 billion) (Gebauer, Kormbaki 2024). The fact that the entire Fund's resources were planned at the beginning of April 2024 (Budras, Löhr, Schäfers 2024) further deepened the dilemma of how to maintain the expenditure ratio at the level of 2% of GDP in 2028 (that is, according to today's GDP it would be approximately EUR 80 billion) and how to provide funds for the reform of the *Bundeswehr* itself.

The Chancellor and the coalition: mobilising the base

One condition for the success of Scholz's initiative was overcoming reluctance to increase defence spending within his own ranks and to secure unconditional support within the *SPD*. This included both chairman, Rolf Mützenich, an influential politician articulating the need for global nuclear disarmament and the pursuit of peace policies. He also contests the need to increase defence spending and military cooperation with the USA and demands the withdrawal of Germany from the nuclear sharing program in NATO. Many *SPD* parliamentarians from its left wing share his views and are grouped into several bodies (Jusos, "Forum Demokratische Linke 21", "Parlamentarische Linke"). The Chancellor's course, although it was a break with the traditional position of the left, was not fundamentally questioned by the party, which should be considered a success in mobilising his own base. The majority of MPs from the *SPD* supported the chancellor for fear of weakening his position vis-à-vis the Christian Democrats (Gathmann, Gebauer, Hagen, Reiber 2022).

Securing the support of his own political group or, in other words, silencing the main opponents in such a sensitive area for the *SPD* as defence policy was key to the success of the *Zeitenwende* for the chancellor. This situation, in all proportions, resembled two previous political flare-ups involving Social Democratic chancellors. The party's resistance to NATO rearmament plans in

1982 led to the fall of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's government, and in 2001, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder faced a similar problem, although on a smaller scale, forcing his own party to support the decision for the *Bundeswehr* to participate in "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan.

The potential of for opposition to increased defence spending among the Greens was smaller and did not result from the tradition of a pacifist understanding of security, as in the case of the *SPD*, but rather from an expanded understanding of security including cybersecurity or the prevention of natural disasters as articulated by Minister Baerbock (PP DB 20/42 2022: 4228). Approving the concept of increased defence spending through the Fund was also a real test of flexibility for the Greens. In fact, however, it was the shock resulting from the Russian invasion that was the decisive factor in further pragmatic modification of the party's position and abandonment of their reluctance to strengthen the *Bundeswehr* and the military sector in general.

In a sense, the *FDP* was speaking with two voices. Although it was generally in favour of increasing spending, similarly to the *CDU/CSU*, it primarily emphasised compliance with fiscal rules. For the *FDP*, one condition of support for the Fund concept was most important, namely that increased defence spending would not violate the debt brake rule, which could occur in the event of a sudden increase in in the defence budget. Altogether, this translated into a cautious approach to the Christian Democrats' demand to increase defence spending in the budget.

While planning the 2024 budget, the party preferences described above emerged with even greater force. The government was not willing to significantly increase defence spending due to the rising costs of energy along with climate and demographic changes that required an adequate response in budget planning based on coalition consensus and the reconciliation of various party positions. Efforts in other areas of the *Zeitenwende*, including independence from Russian gas exports, reorientation of the energy supply and energy transformation, have multiplied the scale of the above-mentioned challenges for the economy and society. This has created the potential for challenges by supporters of the *AfD* and *Die Linke* and, as a result, huge pressure to increase the distribution of social provisions (Übelmesser, 2023: 21), as well as intensified expectations and revived competing demands for a pro-social budget policy on the part of the *SPD* and the Greens. The projection of increasing social spending for the years 2022-2026 suggested that the dilemma between the need to continue increasing defence spending through solutions in the budget itself and insufficient budget revenues will deepen, which in turn will make it more difficult to increase defence

spending (Christofzik, 2023: 8-9). Moreover, after the Fund expires, meeting defence needs will coincide with a period of increasing pressure on the federal budget due to the need to meet the costs of energy transformations and social obligations.

The example of spending plans for 2024 shown above shows that Chancellor Scholz's intention was to use creative budgeting to avert a crisis situation for his alliance commitments, and at the same time to postpone the pressure to fulfil the 2% of GDP commitment until the next term of office of the *Bundestag* from 2025 to 2029.

The general reason for the minimalist planning of defence spending was the desire to reconcile growing social spending in the budget with the principle of maintaining budgetary restraint. Both left-wing parties, but especially the *SPD*, were unable, due to their electorates, to limit social preferences in favour of accepting higher defence spending, and the Ministry of Finance, under the direction of *FDP* leader Christian Lindner, was unable to abandon the rule of the debt brake, which was a fundamental element of the *FDP*'s identity.

The opposition (CDU/CSU) and the coalition: a shaky consensus

Obtaining the votes of the Christian Democrats was necessary to establish the Fund due to the need to create the required two thirds parliamentary majority to amend the Basic Law. Scholz's proposal was based on the assumption that it would be necessary for the coalition to cooperate with the main opposition party, which in turn expected a strengthened transatlantic orientation. The *CDU/CSU* unsuccessfully proposed increasing defence spending to 2%, regardless of the implementation of the Fund, in parallel with an increase in defence spending in the federal budget itself (PP DB 20/30 2022: 2666-2667; 2673-2674). Moreover, unlike the *SPD*, the *CDU/CSU* appealed for the purchase of American F35 aircraft in order to continue Germany's participation in the nuclear sharing program. The issue of defence spending has become a chronic flashpoint between the coalition and the *CDU/CSU*.

The *SPD* opposed the inclusion of defence spending in the Basic Law for ideological and practical reasons (the amount of GDP is not yet known at the time of setting the budget) and was only in favour of the Fund's resources being added to the defence spending in the following years up to the level of 2% of GDP while the Fund mechanism was an exceptional one-off event, in that it would cover an increase in spending on armaments for the *Bundeswehr* only for a period of five years, until 2027 (PP DB 20/30 2022: 2667-2671; Drs. DB 20/1410 2022; Drs. DB 20/1409 2022). This position also meant that after the

funds from the Fund were realised, further increases in expenditures would require further negotiations in order to maintain them at the level of 2% by increasing their share in the federal budget.

The conclusion is that regardless of practical considerations, it was not possible to create a majority for such an increase in defence spending. This was due both to ideological resistance from the leftist factions of the *SPD* and the Greens, and to reservations on the part of the *FDP*, which was interested in maintaining the debt brake.

Another *CDU/CSU* demand that was implemented was the inclusion of a special plan addressing the most pressing deficits and indicating priority arms projects to be financed through a new instrument (*Projekte Sondervermögen...* 2022). This can be seen as in line with the priorities of the decision-making centre, and the Christian Democrats could be satisfied that key projects aimed to implement alliance obligations. The project of purchasing Lockheed F35 aircraft for Germany's participation in the nuclear sharing program now meant confirming the Atlantic line in Germany's security policy.

In the second half of 2023, the conservative manner of constructing defence spending for 2024 based on an increase in expenditures financed from the Fund caused a renewed dispute between the governing coalition and the Christian Democrats, who accused the government of failing to keep its promise of reaching an average of 2% of GDP during the five-year period of the Fund's existence, of increasing expenditures under EP 14 and of downplaying the risk related to failure to finance expenditures at the level of 2% of GDP after the expiration of the Fund in 2027. For the Christian Democrats, what was at stake was Germany's credibility in the alliance and towards its American partner.

Military support for Ukraine

The second aspect of the change in security policy announced by the Chancellor concerned the provision of military assistance to Ukraine. The limited or insufficient dimension of Germany's involvement compared to some other NATO partners (USA, Great Britain, Poland, and the Baltic states) contrasted clearly with its economic and military potential, as well as with its general European and international aspirations. In fact, Germany's delayed, incremental involvement in arms supplies to Ukraine in the first period of the war (until January/February 2023) corresponded to its earlier, rather passive line of conduct in military matters, in this case also inter-

twined with reliance on residual dialogue with Russia. In the next period, the government's actions can be assessed as synchronised with the US approach, and the value of the aid provided can be assessed as constantly increasing.

The Chancellor's position

Scholz's announcement of 27 February 2022 on the supply of portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to Ukraine marked a departure from the previous German position towards Ukraine which disallowed providing it with weapons. It was also a departure from the broader principle of not exporting weapons to countries and regions affected by military conflicts, which had been recently confirmed in the coalition agreement between the *SPD*, the Greens, and the *FDP* (*Mehr Fortschritt...* 2021: 146). The dynamics of the war increased Ukraine's expectations towards NATO countries regarding the supply of not only defensive weapons, but also heavy weapons, such as armour and artillery including missile defence. Criticism from some allies, including Poland and the Baltic states, Ukraine itself, and public opinion was raised not only by the lack of adequate government involvement, but also by the way in which subsequent tranches were communicated such as announcements to the media rather than directly to the Ukrainian side. The size of transfers and, above all, constant delays in the implementation of previously announced deliveries were also targeted. Additionally, the concept of providing aid on a circular basis (*Ringtausch*) was extremely controversial. This involved the compensatory transfer of heavy weapons (Marder transporters and Leopard I and II4A tanks) to allied countries mainly in Eastern Europe such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Poland and Greece, which would in return offer their post-Soviet weapons to Ukraine, mainly T72 tanks and IFV transporters, and the decision-making centre's offers to sell heavy weapons through its domestic producers such as *Krauss-Maffei Wegmann* and *Rheinmetall*. Circular exchange was a key element of the tactic to avoid the transfer of armoured weapons.

Increasing military aid and its scale from some allies, mainly the USA, Great Britain and Eastern European countries, measured in various classifications in relation to their GDP or defence spending, quickly made it clear that Germany was not the leader of this involvement in the initial phase (Ukraine Support Tracker 2022), which could violate the authenticity of its recently announced programme of changes.

As a result of growing expectations within NATO and on the part of the US, which was reflected in the organisation of a special Ramstein format, namely countries willing to provide military assistance to Ukraine in the *Ukraine De-*

fense Contact Group, in the spring of 2022 the Chancellor launched a tactic of dispensing heavy equipment, announcing the transfer of 50 Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns, seven self-propelled howitzers (*Panzerhaubitze 2000*), four MARS II multi-launch missile systems and three IRIS T air defence systems. Later in August, the Chancellor announced the transfer of three more IRIS T systems and five *Panzerhaubitze 2000* self-propelled howitzers (PP DB 20/40 2022: 3914), which indicated an intensification of high-quality military assistance (Jungholt 2022).

The Chancellor often communicated the German position on military support for Ukraine as it evolved over time. The following points can be singled out. Scholz emphasised the alliance aspect, namely that Germany should act in accordance with the line established in NATO; Germany continues to supply arms to the same extent as other allies and will not proceed on its own, which is formulated as “*kein Alleingang*” (no going it alone); Ukraine cannot lose the war; there is no question of peace dictated by Putin (*Regierungserklärung...* 2022); avoidance in public statements of the idea that Russia should be defeated; the *Bundeswehr*'s resources cannot be depleted excessively due to obligations to allies; first of all, the supply of armoured weapons is out of the question for historical reasons, that is it would be unacceptable for German tanks to operate against Russia, as a result of which NATO and Germany would become a party to the conflict, and further escalation could lead to a nuclear war (PP DB 20/24 2022: 1925; PP DB 20/40 2022: 3907-3916; PP DB 20/50 2022: 5321). This position communicated that Germany was acting in agreement with its allies but would not be a leader in support for Ukraine, but neither would it avoid supplying weapons; Germany will support Ukraine militarily for as long as necessary to prevent Russia from winning. The refusal to supply armoured weapons on the assumption that it could lead to World War III or nuclear escalation signalled that what was important for the Chancellor was to develop a line of action for Germany that would be secured within the context of the alliance, but would de facto hide Germany's passivity, and at the same time, as was counted on, it would contain a margin of opportunity to start talks with Russia. A positive change occurred in the approach to Ukraine's attempts to directly purchase weapons from German industry, when Minister Habeck approved the above-mentioned order for as many as 100 *Panzerhaubitze 2000* with delivery in 2024 from *Krauss-Maffei Wegmann* and ammunition from *Rheinmetall* in the amount of EUR 1.7 billion, but without funding from the German government (Murphy 2022).

Chancellor Scholz signalled that he would adapt to the US position, when the Biden administration announced the largest aid package of USD 3 billion.

Scholz, after almost three months of silence, announced on August 24, 2022 further deliveries in 2023 worth EUR 500 million, but again excluding armoured weapons. “We will continue to deliver weapons, from armoured howitzers to air defence systems, month after month” (*Deutschland steht...2022*). This line was also persistently presented by Scholz towards the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Dimitri Shmyhal, during his visit to Berlin on 3 September 2022, suggesting that Germany would not set a precedent because “so far, no tank of Western production has been transferred, and Germany will not act on its own” (*Ukrainischer Regierungschef... 2022*), and then developed this “compensatory” line by offering training in de-mining (together with the Netherlands) and providing equipment and winter equipment for the Ukrainian army, or declaring the main role for Germany in the field of defence air and artillery (*Interview mit Bundeskanzler... 2022*).

However, the extent to which Scholz’s course depended on the dynamic development of the situation in Ukraine was shown by the successful Ukrainian counteroffensive in the first half of September 2022. The scale of the challenge faced by the government and the Chancellor personally increased significantly in the context of the alliance, when the decision-making centre was subjected to persuasion from representatives of the US administration, suggesting a change in their position on the supply of armoured weapons (Geiger, Schwung, Sturm 2022). This undermined the chancellor’s previous protective approach of waiting for the US decision and avoiding acting on his own (Brössler, Krüger, Szymanski 2022; Gathmann, Gebauer, Hagen, Kormbaki 2022). The Chancellor’s position assumed that Germany would not transfer its *Leopard* tanks as long as Washington was not ready to supply its *Abrams* tanks to Ukraine. Under the influence of massive criticism from the CDU/CSU and within his own coalition, the Chancellor and the Minister of Defence again felt forced to take compensatory actions in the form of a decision to transfer two more MARS II launchers and 50 Dingo armoured vehicles (*Weitere Raketenwerfer... 2022*), and to agree to sign a contract the *Krauss-Maffei Wegmann* group with Ukraine for the delivery by 2025 of 18 RCH-155 howitzers worth EUR 216 million from the pool of 100 units previously offered to Ukraine (Geiger, Schwung 2022).

The growing differences with the US administration diminished at the beginning of 2023, when the Chancellor unexpectedly declared the transfer of Marder armoured personnel carriers to Ukraine, and later 14 *Leopard* tanks and one battery of the Patriot air defence system, as well as granting consent to the transfer of Leopard tanks to Ukraine by allies possessing this type of tank (PP DB 20/81, 2023: 9644). The decision on this matter was coordinated with the USA, which agreed to donate 50 M2 Bradley infantry

fighting vehicles, and with France AMX-10RC combat reconnaissance vehicles. The breakthrough in Germany's position regarding tanks was made possible thanks to a concession by President Biden, who agreed to transfer *Abrams* tanks to Ukraine. The creation of a "tank coalition" by Germany, which was to include two battalions of *Leopard* tanks provided by willing allies, encountered significant challenges (Geiger, Schwung 2023,). However, this opened the way for aid to be expanded; on 7 February 2023, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius announced another tranche of 100 *Leopard* 1 tanks by the beginning of 2024. The course for a gradual increase in military assistance in 2023 was agreed upon within the decision-making centre. During his visit to Kyiv on 21 October 2023, Minister Pistorius declared that the value of military aid for Ukraine would increase from EUR 4 billion in 2023 to EUR 8 billion in 2024, which was later confirmed by Chancellor Scholz after a compromise was reached on 15 December 2023 within the coalition regarding the budget for 2024.

In this second phase of the war and due to the breakdown of the decision-making centre over the transfer of armour, Chancellor Scholz tried to emphasise the role of Germany as the second largest supplier of arms to Ukraine (EUR 10.04 billion) after the USA (EUR 43.1 billion), taking into account that attention should be paid to the financial value of this assistance provided in various formats, including from the *Bundeswehr*'s own resources, within the *Ringtausch* (Ukraine Support Tracker 2024) and the format from Ramstein.

The previous pattern in the behaviour of the decision-making centre was revived in the summer of 2023 due to the refusal to transfer Taurus cruise missiles with a unique range of 500 km to Ukraine. Scholz believed that this would contribute to the escalation of the conflict, and Germany would become a party to the war. This was because the use of Taurus would require the participation of *Bundeswehr* soldiers in establishing target coordinates, and therefore in selecting Russian targets (Rinke 2024). And in this case, the allied context created a framework for intensifying persuasion, because in the summer of 2023, Great Britain and France first provided similar weapons in the form of Storm Shadow and Scalp, although with smaller parameters, and in April 2024, a similar decision was made by the United States (ATACMS). And again, this time in the face of delayed key aid from the US in the amount of USD 60 billion, Germany, in order to present its commitment, acted "in compensation" by announcing, within the contact group, a significant package of EUR 0.5 billion including a component for needed ammunition and the establishment of an air defence coalition on 18 March 2024 (Grosse, 2024).

Chancellor and coalition: the dysfunction of the base

The evolution of Berlin's position, regardless of US attempts at persuasion, was largely influenced by internal factors such as the lack of sufficient agreement within the coalition itself, more or less covert opposition within the ranks of the *SPD*, as well as the attention paid by the Chancellor's centre to the changing mood of public opinion, which on the one hand condemned Russian aggression, and on the other hand was concerned about possible negative consequences for the socio-economic situation of Germany, which was instrumentalised by the opposition from the right (*AfD*) and left (*Die Linke*) wings of the political spectrum.⁶ Due to these circumstances, maximising the supply of heavy weapons could seem problematic for the decision-making centre as well as for the Chancellor's party and its pacifist identity.

It can therefore be noted that in the case of weapons supplies to Ukraine, a similar situation occurred as in the case of defence spending. The breakthrough decision made by the narrow centre required building political support and breaking yet another military related taboo.

The question arises as to what extent the decision-making centre was capable of, or interested in, mobilising the coalition's base of support. The Chancellor justified his reserved stance on supplies by the need to avoid engaging in war and provoking Russia into escalation. This approach was not stabilised within the coalition. Among the Greens and the *FDP*, there were more and more voices sharing the Christian Democrats' arguments for the transfer of weapons. This issue was thus the subject of constant controversy both between the decision-making centre and the Christian Democrat opposition, and within the government coalition itself, between the centre and declared pro-Ukraine supporters from the ranks of the Greens and *FDP*. The intra-coalition dispute, taking place on the classic government-opposition axis, was an important context influencing the Chancellor's course of adaptation.

Despite formal support for Ukraine largely influenced by the shock from the first phase of the war in 2022, the *SPD* actually remained opposed to increasing key aid. There were tensions between the Chancellor's entourage, supported by party co-chairman Lars Klingbeil, and the left wing of the party, headed by faction chair Rolf Mützenich. This faction was dominated by a critical pacifist orientation, opposed to arming Ukraine and calling for a diplomatic solution mediated by China (Teevs 2022). There were few supporters of arming Ukraine such as Michael Roth, the chairman of the *Bundestag*'s foreign

⁶ This article omits analysis of the position of these two political parties.

affairs committee. The transfer of armoured weapons, in the opinion of the vast majority of the *SPD*, would be tantamount to Germany entering the war on the side of Ukraine and the risk of nuclear war. This was out of the question due to the party's pacifist identity and the mood in the *SPD* electorate, of which Chancellor Scholz himself was aware (*Regierungserklärung...* 2022). The *SPD*, breaking with the tradition of excluding arms exports, made a giant step forward since the beginning of the war.

In the *FDP*, the group that advocated military support for Ukraine and criticised the Chancellor was relatively active. The *FDP*'s expert on defence policy and chair of the *Bundestag*'s defence committee, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, repeatedly criticised the Chancellor's policy on Ukraine in the media as did, to a lesser extent, the expert on defence Markus Faber, secretary general Bijan Djir-Sarai, and Johannes Vogel, the party's deputy chair. They demanded the transfer of armour and, like the *CDU/CSU*, expressed the belief that Germany should take an active role (PP DB 20/54 2022: 5876). The head of the party, Minister of Finance, Christian Lindner, traditionally showed restraint and did not comment on the issue of arming Ukraine.

The coalition circle of security policy experts also spawned three- or two-party initiatives demonstrating in the public space, outside the *Bundestag*, support for the supply of heavy weapons, including armour. These caused sharp reactions from the Chancellor and the *SPD*, such as the trip to Ukraine on 12 April 2022 by three parliamentarians, Strack-Zimmermann from the *FDP*, Anton Hofreiter from the Greens and Michael Roth from the *SPD* aroused the anger of the left wing of the *SPD*, as well as of Scholz himself (Feldhoff, 2022).

The most far-reaching evolution of views on arms supplies was observed among the Greens. The voices of individual prominent MPs such as the chair of the European Affairs Committee Anton Hofreiter, who looked favourably at the *CDU/CSU* draft resolutions in the *Bundestag*, were joined by representatives of the Green leadership, co-chair Omid Nouripour and co-chair Ricarda Lang, in connection with the successful Ukrainian counter-offensive in the autumn of 2022 (*Göring-Eckhardt kritisiert...* 2022; Gathmann, Gebauer, Hagen, Reiber 2022), and especially Minister of Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock in an interview for "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung" (Leithäuser 2022). This demonstrated the deepening disagreements both at coalition level and, more importantly, within the government, regarding the supply of armoured weapons and the further distancing of the Greens from the *SPD*. The culmination of the criticism of the decision-making centre was a joint public appeal in mid-October 2022. Members of the *Bundestag* from the Greens and the *FDP* but not the *SPD*, called on the federal government and partners from the EU

and NATO to increase the effectiveness of military assistance for the liberation of the occupied territories, while at the same time demanding that the government take over a leading role for Germany to coordinate actions, because the country was predestined for this due to its potential as well as for humanitarian and historical considerations (Kormbaki, Schult 2022). The chancellor's decision to hand over *Marders* and *Leopards* was welcomed by politicians from the Greens and *FDP*, as well as the *CDU/CSU*.

The issue of transferring *Taurus* missiles, much like the dispute over armoured weapons in 2022, once more sparked deep disagreements within the coalition and between the coalition and the Christian Democrat opposition. The Chancellor was subjected to sharp criticism by the coalition's proponents of military aid. The centre of gravity was the debate in the *Bundestag* on the adoption of a resolution on further military aid, including long-range weapons, which was supported by the coalition parties and the *CDU/CSU* because it did not create any compulsion for the Chancellor to act. The draft coalition resolution was weakened by the left wing of the *SPD*, which prevented a stricter wording. During the debate, its exponent, Ralf Stegner, rejected a competing motion by the Christian Democrats and struck anti-militarist tones, criticising military spending, which was a direct blow to the Chancellor and Minister Pistorius himself (PP DB 20/154: 19,608). However, dozens of representatives of the Greens and *FDP* protested against Scholz's line, arguing for a quick transfer of the *Taurus* missiles (PP DB 20/154: 19,621 et seq.; Drs. DB 20/10375).

On the other hand, it was the evolving attitude of the *SPD*, as in the case of defence spending, that created a circumstance of ambivalent importance. On the one hand, its resistance made it difficult for the Chancellor to make a decision in favour of the transfer of the *Taurus* weapons, and on the other, it was a pretext for the refusal, which could partly suggest that Scholz intends to present himself as a "chancellor of peace" and that he is not an advocate of military aid for Ukraine, which could be evidenced by the financial dimension of Germany's involvement and the large volume of weapons already transferred.

*The Opposition (CDU/CSU) and the Chancellor's coalition:
an arms supply offensive*

From the beginning of the war, the *CDU/CSU* was a supporter of expanding arms supplies to include heavy weapons. This line was uncomfortable for the decision-making centre and its passive approach and resulted in pressure. Thus, on 28 April 2022, a joint resolution of the coalition and the *CDU/CSU* was passed in the *Bundestag*, calling on the federal government to "continue

arms supplies and include heavy weapons and complex systems, for example as part of a circular exchange” (Drs. DB 20/1550; PP DB 20/31 2022: 2721). The circumstances surrounding the creation of this resolution demonstrated the driving role of the Christian Democrat opposition in the *Bundestag*.⁷ This consisted in the fact that leading politicians and experts from the *CDU/CSU* continuously admonished the Chancellor to increase arms supplies, and especially to transfer armoured weapons such as *Marder* transporters and *Leopard* tanks, accusing him of disregarding the above-mentioned landmark resolution of the *Bundestag* and taking advantage of difficulties in negotiating with allies from NATO’s *Ringtausch*. They contrasted his performance with the positive example of deliveries of advanced weapons from the USA, Poland, Great Britain and the Czech Republic and, arguing that Germany’s image was being damaged and with that came a progressive decline in influence within NATO and an inability to lead (PP DB 20/50 2022: 5311 et seq.). Friedrich Merz attacked the Chancellor over his conversation with Putin on 13 September 2022 and his calls for a “diplomatic solution” that would lead to a ceasefire. He accused the Chancellor of proposing negotiations over the heads of Ukrainians, while “Germany is not an intermediary, but stands on Ukraine’s side” and “just as the government says that it cannot act alone in the matter of arms supplies, it cannot act alone and demand negotiations regarding a truce” (Gutschker, Schuller, 2022). The draft *CDU/CSU* resolution of 20 September 2022 called on the Chancellor to “take responsibility for leadership” and immediately issue permits for the export of heavy weapons from industrial resources, in particular armoured combat vehicles and more long-range artillery from *Bundeswehr* resources, and also guarantee training by the *Bundeswehr* for Ukrainian soldiers to operate this equipment (Drs. DB 20/3490). This resolution, as well as previous *CDU/CSU* drafts (Drs. DB 20/2347), debated in the *Bundestag*, on 22 and 28 September 2022, justified the need for supplies on allied grounds and were aimed at embroiling the government and the coalition in various contradictions between the fact that significant categories of heavy weapons were transferred, but armoured weapons were not. They contributed to deepening the polarisation in the ranks of the coalition by exploiting the differences between the Greens, *FDP*, and *SPD* (PP DB 20/54 2022: 5870 et seq.; PP DB 20/56 2022: 3175 et seq.)

⁷ The *CDU/CSU* used various debates in the *Bundestag*, for example in connection with the EU summit on Ukraine on 30-31 May 2022 (18 May 2022), budget presentation (1 June 2022, 7 September 2022) and its own proposals regarding the supply of heavy weapons (27 July 2022, 22 September 2022).

The controversy surrounding the transfer of *Taurus* missiles showed a near split in the coalition and an almost uniform approach of the Greens, *FDP*, and *CDU/CSU*. Only the need to preserve the coalition and avoid an open conflict stopped the representatives of the *FDP* and the Greens from voting twice in favour of the resolutions of the Christian Democrats on 20 February 2024 and 14 March 2024, demanding the transfer of the *Taurus* missiles (Drs. DB 20/10379; Drs. 20/9143; PP DB 20/154: 19621 et seq.; PP DB 20/157: 20107). The Christian Democrats' criticism and their proposals for the transfer of heavy weapons in the form of armoured weapons to be followed by *Taurus* missiles, strengthened the polarisation within the coalition, but were unable to independently bring about a breakthrough in the position of the decision-making centre. On the other hand, once the Chancellor decided to transfer armoured weapons, adapting his approach to US expectations, the arguments of critics from within the coalition and Christian Democrat critics enabled the tactical integration of pacifist opponents into the *SPD*. However, in the case of the *Taurus*, the Chancellor did not take into account the change in the US approach regarding long-range missiles because his position was based on complex assumptions regarding a fear of escalation from Russia and the German strategic culture, requiring the consent of the *Bundestag* for the *Bundeswehr* to operate outside the borders of the Federal Republic.

Conclusions

The decision-making centre's efforts to mobilise both its own political base and secure cross-party support in two key areas of the *Zeitenwende*, namely defence spending and military support for Ukraine, have brought about mixed and ambiguous results. The positives include the amendment of the Basic Law and the launch of a special extra-budgetary solution in the form of a Fund for the *Bundeswehr*. However, the issue of continuing the trend of increasing defence spending after 2027 is at present causing major controversy within the coalition. On the other hand, growing military aid for Ukraine was gradual and slow due to the lack of internal political consensus, but eventually allowed Germany to play the role of a key European donor.

Both of these inflammatory issues are among the reasons for the progressive fragmentation of the three-party coalition. The tensions resulting from the varying preferences of the coalition partners and the Christian Democrats were difficult to manage by the decision-making centre, which was additionally confronted with the expectations of the allies, who counted on the Scholz

government to reduce significant deficits in German security policy and to oversee a more active role for Germany.

The new consensus on increasing defence spending was possible because the Scholz government was able to negotiate support from the Christian Democrats, win over the increasingly pragmatic Greens and at the same time convince the left wing of his own party, which had previously protested against the emphasis on military issues in German policy as militarisation. The consensus decisions to increase defence spending in early June 2022 symbolised a break in German security policy, a retreat from the current practice of saving on defence, which, incidentally, was co-authored by Olaf Scholz, who as Vice-Chancellor and Minister of Finance in Chancellor Angela Merkel's government from 2018-2021.

For the German left, the *SPD*, and the Greens, accepting defence spending on the scale set by NATO, even for the next five years until 2026, meant another important milestone on the way to breaking a current taboo regarding their pacifist approach to security matters. On the one hand, the establishment of a Fund supporting the fulfilment of the allied obligation (2% level of defence spending) and improving the quality of the armed forces strengthened the pro-Atlantic orientation of German security policy, which was problematic for the *SPD* due to the resistance of its pacifist left wing. On the other hand, the decision-making centre's course on increasing defence spending was limited by the preferences of the *SPD* and, partly, the Greens for social spending. These preferences, in turn, conflicted with the views of the third coalition partner, the *FDP*, which was reluctant to violate the debt brake at all. Increasing defence spending was a priority for the Christian Democrats. Open conflict over its continuation at an increased level both between individual coalition parties and between the coalition and the Christian Democrats will be resolved after the next *Bundestag* elections in 2025.

On the issue of military support for Ukraine, the course of procrastination set by the decision-making centre, which sought synchronisation with the position of the US administration, did not have full support in the coalition due to the reservations of the left wing of the *SPD*. The initial inter-party unanimity in favour of arms supplies (joint resolution of the *SPD*, Greens, *FDP*, and *CDU/CSU* parliamentary groups of 28 April 2022) was reinterpreted by the decision-making centre in order to exclude the transfer of armoured weapons. Criticism from some within the *FDP*, the Greens, and above all the *CDU/CSU*, prompted the Chancellor to take compensatory measures in the form of breaking down deliveries of other types of weapons, being active in the Ramstein Contact Group, organising the *Ringtausch* or issuing consent to deliveries by German industry.

The safeguard formula emphasising that Germany would not act on its own (*kein Alleingang*) and would only transfer heavy weapons provided by its allies, that is that they would not provide Western-produced armour, allowed Scholz to avoid assuming the troublesome role of leader until the spring of 2023, when, after a change in the position on the transfer of armoured weapons, the importance of Germany as a leader emerging as Ukraine's most important European military partner began to be gradually emphasised.

The Chancellor, trying to maintain his own original course despite pressure from the Christian Democrats and parts of the Greens and *FDP*, was guided by the intention of maintaining the integrity of his position with the *SPD*, which depended on taking into account pacifist sentiments and the reluctance of the party's left wing to embrace the newly declared *Zeitenwende*. Uncertainty regarding the *SPD*'s acceptance of continuing increased defence spending after 2027 and the party's negative position on the transfer of *Taurus* cruise missiles to Ukraine generally weakened the inter-party consensus and raised questions regarding the government's determination to implement the *Zeitenwende*.

It was the *SPD*'s position on the issue of supplies of armoured weapons and later *Taurus* missiles, as well as Chancellor Scholz's own sense of pragmatism that compelled him to be cautious towards Russia for fear of escalation, including the possibility of it using nuclear weapons. It was an expression of connection with sceptical voices within the party about the use of military force, as well as with the mood of a significant part of the public with a pacifist orientation. The reluctance to violate the taboo on armoured weapons and later the refusal to hand over the *Taurus* missiles was therefore a tribute to the pacifist orientation in the *SPD*, and at the same time an instrument for maintaining influence over the party. At the same time, this course increasingly complicated relations with the *FDP* and the Greens. It was also problematic from the point of view of Germany's involvement as a reliable partner in strengthening the Alliance.

It should be emphasised that the Chancellor's tactics included incremental changes and the successive transfer of other categories of valuable weapons in the form of key air defence systems such as *IRIS* or *Patriot*. Scholz had to take into account not only intense criticism from the *CDU/CSU*, but also the risk of divisions in the coalition due to an emerging inter-party constellation in favour of supplies, consisting of the Greens, the *FDP* and the Christian Democrats, fearing that the Chancellor's course, deferring to *SPD* resistance, would make it difficult to strengthen the Ukraine military. This could also result in a weakening of Germany's position among the allies and, consequently, Berlin's voice on the future of Ukraine and security in Central and Eastern Europe. However,

the Chancellor left no doubt that Germany was on Ukraine's side and repeatedly declared that German support would continue.

The importance of the alliance for the *Zeitenwende* in the area of weapons supplies to Ukraine, that is the problem of possible allied influence on the change of Germany's position. In reality the American administration and allied structures in NATO, so visible earlier in the question of defence spending, cannot be interpreted as a source generating changes in the behaviour of the decision-making centre but rather as an environment modelling its evolution. The alliance served as a safeguard for the adopted course of adaptation, when the Chancellor, who constantly emphasised the *kein Alleingang* formula, excluded the supply of armoured weapons, citing the lack of appropriate arrangements with the USA. At other times he justified the decision to transfer heavy weapons in coordination with the Biden administration (although so far it has not decided to transfer the *Taurus* missiles even though the US has provided ATACSM missiles to Ukraine). The alliance factor also played an important role in the approach of the Christian Democratic opposition and intra-coalition critics when they referred to alliance expectations in order to claim that the Chancellor was creating "divisions in Europe" or even that he was preventing Germany from leading the Alliance and weakening its position within it. For the Christian Democrats, the alliance factor rather energised their pressure on the decision-making centre.

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ABSTRACT

*Chancellor Scholz’s speech of 27 February 2022 in which he announced that his government would make fundamental changes to German security policy in the wake of Russian aggression against Ukraine should, in theory, translate into a more influential role for Germany in Europe. The implementation of the *Zeitenwende* (epochal change) is a test for German security policy in the allied context, but also requires the decision-making centre to create stable conditions domestically. It can be assumed that the effectiveness of the change depends on consensus in the experimental three-party coalition government and on securing the partial support of the Christian Democrats as well. A hypothesis can be put forward that the scope and scale of the undertaken turn in these two areas were determined not so much by expectations on the part of the US and other allies as by the domestic context, that is the limited ability of the decision-making centre to build broader supra-coalition support and to manage tensions. The author’s aim is to clarify the ability of the decision-making centre to manage the tensions arising from the pressure of the Christian Democrat opposition and the widening divergence within the coalition between the supporters of adaptation (the Greens and the FDP) and its opponents – pro-military force sceptics (the left wing of the SPD). The article, based on the literature of the subject, the press and Internet information, examines two issues, the questions of increased defence spending and arms supplies to Ukraine are analysed through the prism of relations in a tripartite set-up, the decision-making centre, the coalition parties, and the Christian Democrat opposition.*

