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Another War in Europe? In Whose Name?

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2014 is gone. 100 years ago the Great War of 1914-1918 was unleashed to take away many millions of human lives and destroy four empires. Now the old continent is threatened again. The ominous signs are visible; the information about Ukraine is reduced to a minimum by European media outlets. This approach is not only myope and light-minded - they misinform people and the deceit could lead to tragic consequences.

Prominent people who described the events of WWI forthwith, like, for instance, Grand Admiral Alfred Friedrich von Tirpitz, have provided irrefutable evidence of the fact that European politicians had underestimated the threat of all-out war till the last moment. A number of warnings on this account have already been voiced in Germany. In early December, 60 prominent German personalities from the realms of politics, economics, culture and the media signed a letter published by Die Zeit "War in Europe Again? Not in Our Names!" All the politicians who signed the paper have been ranking officials in the past: a former federal president, a former chancellor, former federal ministers and former prime ministers of federal lands. Only former big shots - never incumbents. That's life. That's what German politics is about - the rules are strict and nobody wants to doom his or her political career. The idea to publish the letter was initiated by influential representatives of leading political parties: Christian Democrat Horst Teltschik, Social Democrat Walther Stützel, Antje Vollmer, a member of the Green Party. Dr. Horst Teltschik is a German politician and business manager. He served as national security advisor to Chancellor Helmut Kohl and held a number of other important

positions in the German government. From 1999 to 2008, he chaired the Munich Conference on Security Policy, which hosts the premier global international security event bringing security professionals and decision-makers together. As Teltschik explained, he put his signature to prevent the loss of what has been achieved during the recent 25 years as the relationship with Russia developed, though the letter is mainly devoted not to the bilateral relations but rather to serious consequences to be entailed by further escalation of conflict. The authors say the people are scared of another war. (1)

The appeal is addressed to the government, members of parliament and media. What is striking – the federal TV channels ARD and ZDF never said a word about this important public initiative! Die Zeit was the only German newspaper to publish the document. Like if trying to make up for the committed mistake, the newspaper soon introduced its readers to the opinion of those who angrily lambasted the letter of 60. The article written in response was called Putin Closes the Window to Europe (2). Newspapers Frankfurter Allgemeine and Süddeutsche Zeitung published materials containing harsh criticism of the appeal of 60 without publishing the letter itself! You're welcome to condemn it without reading first! Lutz Bachmann, the leader of the movement which involves more and more people into the protests against Islamization of Germany, flatly refused to talk to journalists.

The posts published in reaction to the anti-letter responses are more interesting than the articles themselves. There are many of them. For instance, a thousand of newspaper's readers commented on the Die Zeit publication. Many condemn the West blaming it for absence of self-criticism and inability to take on at least some responsibility for starting and escalating the conflict in Ukraine. Some say Western politicians lead Europe to war and they want this madness stopped. (3) Around a half of posts contain harsh criticism of West's policy. By and large, the public surveys say the same thing. For instance, in December 51% of responders in comparison with 41% in September said that in their opinion Russia really believed it was threatened by the West. It strikes an eye that the number of those who supported a more active participation of NATO in Ukrainian conflict dwindled by 16%. It's a pity that 40% have not changed their views. It means the idea still has a considerable support. (4) It is even more worrisome that 61% of Germans endorse the Berlin's tougher stance on Russia in its dialogue with Moscow. The same survey says Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier has a modest lead over Chancellor Angela Merkel. 70% of respondents approve his work (the survey puts the Angela Merkel's approval rating at 67%) while 23% disapprove it (in comparison 32% do not approve of the job the Chancellor is doing). Perhaps the stances adopted by the politicians on Ukraine make difference: Steinmeier wants to sound soft on the issue unlike the Chancellor who keeps on insisting the anti-Russia sanctions are necessary. She has even let know the sanctions could be toughened. That's what one of the posts send to Märkische Oderzeitung forum says about the Merkel's policy toward Russia, "The frenzied rhetoric of this woman is unbearable. Her rule has nothing to do with politics. She does not care about German people." "13 years ago Putin offered the Russian heart to us (meaning his speech delivered in Bundestag in 2001). And how did we respond to it?" "May 8 is the latest date for Merkel to lend a hand to Russia! All other things are nothing else but fuelling hatred and spurring further escalation!" (5)

The differences between Steinmeier and Merkel on Russia periodically get into the German media's radar screen, though it's hard to grasp the gist of it. Social Democrat Steinmeier is

concerned over possible deterioration of economic situation. So what? German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany is also concerned over the anti-Russia sanctions but does not support the idea of lifting or at least easing them. The rhetoric of Social Democrats appears to be a bit less tough but it has no influence on Berlin.

There is an impression that Chancellor Merkel and Foreign Minister Steinmeier just put on an act - a badly played amateur performance. It's not even "a bad cop-good cop" classic game but rather it's "a bad cop (Merkel) - a not so bad cop (Steinmeier)" version. Such performances lack of taste and depth. Anyway, playing such roles will hardly enhance the German liberals' credibility.

1) "Wieder Krieg in Europa? Nicht in unserem Namen!" / Zeit, 5. Dezember 2014.

2) Putin schließt das Fenster zu Europa / Zeit, 8. Dezember 2014.

3) <http://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2014-12/russland-ukraine-putin-aufruf-ruprecht-polenz?commentstart=1#comments>

4) ARD survey – DeutschlandTREND Dezember 2014. S. 8, 13. Such surveys are conducted every month.

5) <http://www.moz.de/kommentare/mc/1354581/216/1/>. Russia is the only country Germany never officially apologized to for unleashing WWII. At that the anti-historic version of the events is spread in Germany as well as in the West in general. It says that "two dictatorships" clashed and there was no difference between Hitler and Stalin.