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U.S. — GERMANY RELATIONS UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF BARACK OBAMA

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For the United States, Germany is one of the key partners in the EU and NATO; however, in the international relations of these two partners, there is a decline and divergences on some issues. The article analyzes the bilateral relations between the US and Germany under the presidency of Barack Obama.

The United States of America and Germany are closely interrelated. Shared history, full of rosy and hard periods, made the relations of the two countries deep. After the end of the Second World War, West Germany (FRG), with the help of the United States, managed to regain its feet. The Marshall Plan ensured the economic recovery, and the US military bases guaranteed the defense of the country during the Cold War. The two countries have close ties, and a considerable contribution to this was made by hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and their families who lived and worked at the US military bases in Germany. After the end of the Cold War, the number of US troops in Germany began to decrease. With the reduction in the number of Americans in Germany, the German-American relations began, to some extent, to deteriorate. The war in Iraq brought about a serious rift in the relations between the United States and Germany, and spy scandals and eavesdropping on mobile phone conversations of Chancellor Angela Merkel undermined the credibility of the two countries. However, Germany remains a strategic ally of the US in Europe.

In turn, the Germans have an ambiguous attitude to American foreign policy. Germany does not support certain actions of the US government in the international arena such as, for example, the intervention in Libya, but, at the same time, the Germans closely monitor how much attention Washington pays to Berlin in its foreign policy. The relations between the US and Germany are built, among other things, through the personal relations between the two countries' leaders, which started back in 2008, with the then election campaign of the President to be Barack Obama. During his visit to Germany, Obama, being a presidential candidate, asked the German government for an opportunity to make a speech at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. This place is a symbol of divided Berlin and Europe as well as of American history involving the participation of the United States in

the Cold War. It is in this place that Ronald Reagan called on Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. In 2008, German Chancellor Angela Merkel refused to allow Obama to deliver his speech against the background of the Brandenburg Gate on the pretext that such a place of honor was reserved for persons of high standing of the level of acting statesmen. In the US, they then suspected that Merkel rejected Obama's request under the influence of the then Republican president George W. Bush. Obama in 2008 got in Berlin a place for a meeting in the square near the Victory Column. This initial episode reflected in the personal relations of B. Obama and A. Merkel. It did not contribute to the establishment of friendship between the two leaders. Leaders of both the US and Germany are cold, business-like, and rational in their mutual relations. There is even a reason to believe that there is a personality problem in the relations between the leaders of the US and Germany.

Some experts in the American-German relations indicate that A. Merkel is ideologically closer to the Bush presidential family, if only because G. Bush senior is historically associated with the reunification of Germany. A. Merkel came to the post of Chancellor in 2005, at a time when it was believed that the US-German relations were at a relatively low level. The center-left predecessor of A. Merkel, Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder, refused to support the US war in Iraq outraging the then US President George W. Bush. By contrast, A. Merkel, being the leader of the opposition, in 2003, during her visit to Washington, publicly supported the US military plans on Iraq. Therefore, for President George W. Bush, A. Merkel as the German leader was better than Gerhard Schröder, who in the US was suspected of over-confidential and self-serving relations with Moscow. However, A. Merkel, after coming to the post of Chancellor, was forced to outwardly distance herself from American President George W. Bush, who had become extremely unpopular in Europe.

Barack Obama's ascent to power seemingly eliminated this outward inconvenience. It is known that, in addition to the conventional communication channel through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany under the control of Free Democrat Guido Westerwelle, Merkel's Chancellery contacted directly, even to discuss fairly simple questions, with Presidential Administration in Washington. The US President awarded in 2011 German Chancellor A. Merkel the Medal of Freedom - one of the highest awards of the United States. It was done to recognize the important role played by the German Chancellor in crisis-ridden Europe. The new presidential election campaign of Barack Obama in the US took place at the time when the crisis of sovereign debts in the euro area of the EU reached its peak. The debt crisis that developed in Europe with the prospect of the collapse of the euro could derail the US economic recovery. Under these conditions, in the summer of 2012, Obama sent to Berlin his Finance Minister Tim Geithner hoping to moderate the tough line of A. Merkel on the issue of budget savings in Europe and to convince her to implement some short-term priming of economy. This trip was unsuccessful, and in Washington, they preferred not to enlarge on this on the eve of the presidential election, as it was an obvious setback in the US-German relations.

It has not been the only one episode in recent years when the political paths of B. Obama and A. Merkel diverged, though in other cases they did so not in such a dramatic way. In 2011, the Chancellor of Germany opposed the US intervention in Libya, supporting during voting the position of Russia and China in the UN Security Council concerning creating a no-fly zone over Libya. The representative of Germany then abstained from voting, along with the representatives of Russia, China, India, and Brazil. Under A. Merkel, Germany did not adopt in August 2013 the US plans for Syria, either. Certain additional outward tensions in the US-German relations arose at the time due to the scandal with Edward Snowden's exposing the US intelligence activities in Germany. The public opinion of the country showed an emotional reaction to this fact, and the German Chancellor – a purely pragmatic one.

Apart from that, the German press actively discussed the fact that the US intelligence spoke about Germany as about a “third-class partner.” The statistics that fell into the public domain thanks to Edward Snowden shows that the National Security Agency (NSA) of the US is engaging in espionage in Germany no less intensely than in China or Iraq. Does this mean that Germany is not perceived as a true ally, but only as a “third-class partner”? James Bamford, author of three books about the NSA, has the following opinion: “It is rather a technical term that means that Germany is classified as a third party, while the “first” party is America itself, and the “second” ones are its close allies: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, which are also called “five eyes” [1]. According to John Bamford, the attitude of the US intelligence to Germany is ambivalent: on the one hand, Washington and Berlin are partners, but on the other hand, Germany is an object of espionage. The attention of the NSA is focused just on Germany because the latter is Europe's economic locomotive, and it is very interesting for the US. In addition, this country has a strong political influence on Europe. Also, the terrorists who staged the attacks against the World Trade Center on September 11 lived in Germany.

The apparent lack of confidence on the part of one of the closest allies is definitely annoying Germans. At the same time, Germany fears, for various reasons (both historical and current political ones), any conflict with America. In the last 60 years, the development of the relations with the United States has been the basis of the German foreign policy. A conflict with Washington is fraught with very serious consequences for any country. In addition, Berlin is now in a bind as it is: Germany is actually trying to reformat the relations within the EU, which is not liked by many in Europe. In this context, the Germans have no desire to take on the burden of a conflict with the US [3].

The US and Germany have very close economic ties. Thus, for example, in 2015, the United States became the largest trading partner of Germany, leaving behind France that for several decades in a row had had the palm. Over 2015, the foreign trade turnover of Germany with the United States grew by 20 percent - to 173 billion euros. This was mainly due to the fact that the volume of German exports to the United States increased by 19 percent – to 114 billion euros. Germany is currently the backbone of the economic relations of the US with the EU.

The German-American economic relations, of course, go far beyond trade. German companies heavily invest in America; they cooperate with each other within the framework of projects, in joint ventures, and investments. The Germans are interested in Silicon Valley, where more than anywhere else the future peeps out and where the future of the digital economy comes true. The Americans are interested in many small and big German world-class industrial and engineering companies. Bilateral investments between Germany and the United States totaled at the end of 2014 339 billion US dollars, due to which in the two countries many well-paid jobs were created [2].

The two countries also have some divergences concerning the issue of the Ukrainian crisis. In response to the Russian intervention in Ukraine, the United States and the EU slap on Moscow joint economic sanctions. But Germany's geographical proximity to Russia and their close economic ties do not allow Washington and Berlin to develop a unified strategy for the Ukrainian crisis. Within the NATO, chances of a split on the issue of long-term relations with Russia becomes higher and higher. According to representatives of the US Administration, Germany and the United States are united in their attitude to the events in Ukraine. However, Germany at the same time refuses to impose broad sanctions against the Russian energy industry as they can be reflected in its own economy. Another difference of opinion between the United States and Germany regarding the Ukrainian crisis was revealed at the Munich Security Conference held in the Bavarian capital in February 2015. The main question of the forum was that of the possibility to provide Kyiv with weapons, which was lobbied by the Americans and which was decidedly answered in the negative by A. Merkel. A number of US politicians have criticized the stance of Berlin. There were no such differences of opinion at the Munich Conference since 2003, when Berlin refused to participate in the military operations in Iraq. The administration of B. Obama helped Brussels in solving the Ukrainian crisis, but doing so it hoped that further conflict settlement would be dealt with by the EU, especially Germany. But Berlin has the desire to return to normal relations with Russia, though it is aware that tensions will persist in the future.

Bruce Stokes, the director of global economic relations of "Pew Research Center" notes that 57 percent of the Germans believe that it is more important for their country to have strong ties with the US rather than with Russia. Only 15 percent of the Germans prefer to have strong ties with Russia and only 21 percent of the respondents believe that it is better to have close relations with both countries. But this does not mean that the Germans have the desire to expand sanctions in the future. The Americans and the Germans disagree about the nature of the current position of the United States and the EU towards Russia [4].

In summary it can be concluded that, under the presidency of B. Obama, the bilateral political relations between the US and Germany deteriorated but not dramatically, and they are still quite strong. For Washington, Berlin remains one of the main partners in the EU and the NATO. In the short-run, drastic changes should not be expected. Because of the Ukrainian crisis, the US and Germany are in "the same boat." Moreover, A. Merkel with her Atlanticist narrative defends

the interests of the German big business which is focused on the United States. It is worth noting that both the volume of investments and the volume of trade of Germany with the United States are massively higher than what Berlin has with Moscow. Economically, America is important for Germany, Berlin is interested in a transatlantic free trade area. Washington, in turn, understands it very well and uses it as a means of influence. This Atlantic trend is associated with the uncertainty of the Europeans in their global competitiveness in the future. German-American differences over how to confront Russia will become an ordeal for the two states.

If the new White House administration does not fundamentally change the US foreign policy, it is possible that tensions between Washington and Berlin will grow. There are quite a number of German politicians who believe that Germany is a satellite of the United States and that for them it is unprofitable to follow in the American wake, because through it, in their view, Europe is marginalized globally, becoming such a region as it was during the Cold War – an object of Soviet-American relations. The spy scandals have also increased the number of supporters of “anti-Americanism” in Germany and of improving the relations with Moscow.

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Under the presidency of Barack Obama, the bilateral relations between the US and Germany deteriorated, but not fundamentally, and they are still quite strong. Germany still remains one of the main partners of the US in the EU and the NATO; and the economic relations continue to develop. However, stances of the two countries on certain political issues such as the conflicts in the Middle East or the Ukrainian crisis are different, and spy scandals marred the confidence of the Germans in the US government. If the new White House administration does not fundamentally change the US foreign policy, it is possible that tensions between Washington and Berlin will grow. There are quite a number of German politicians who believe that Germany is a satellite of the United States and that for them it is unprofitable to follow in the American wake, because through it, in their view, Europe is marginalized globally, becoming such a

region as it was during the Cold War — an object of Soviet-American relations. The spy scandals have also increased the number of supporters of “anti-Americanism” in Germany and of improving the relations with Moscow.

При президентстві Б. Обами двосторонні відносини між США та Німеччиною погіршилися, але не кардинально, і вони все ще досить міцні. Німеччина, як і раніше, залишається одним із головних партнерів США в ЄС та НАТО, а економічні зв'язки продовжують розвиватися. Проте позиції щодо певних політичних питань, таких як близькосхідні конфлікти або українська криза, у двох держав відрізняються, а шпигунські скандали підірвали довіру німців до американського уряду.

При президентстве Б. Обамы двусторонние отношения между США и Германией ухудшились, но не кардинально, и они все еще достаточно крепкие. Германия все также остается одним из главных партнеров США в ЕС и НАТО, а экономические связи продолжают развиваться. Однако позиции по определенным политическим вопросам, таким как ближневосточные конфликты или украинский кризис, у двух государств отличаются, а шпионские скандалы подорвали доверие немцев к американскому правительству.

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