

U.S. and Germany Wake Up to Putin

By [Lilia Shevtsova](#)

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The West is starting to change its views on Russia. In September, the European Parliament adopted a resolution criticizing how court decisions are often politically driven in Russia. In October, the European Parliament proposed that the European Council come up with its own Magnitsky list. In November, the Magnitsky Act was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives and the German Bundestag approved a sharp resolution criticizing the Kremlin's crackdown on human rights and other elements of a democratic society.

These steps may spell the end of Washington and Berlin's illusions regarding a possible integration of Putin's Russia into the West. The adoption of the Magnitsky Act effectively ends Washington's reset policy, while the Bundestag's resolution signals the end of the German experiments in a "modernization partnership."

At the same time, however, the loss of patience with the Kremlin does not mean Washington and Berlin are ready to completely bury the reset with Moscow. Both the U.S. and Germany are fixated on their own problems. Russia is ready to cooperate with the West, although the Kremlin will probably continue to engaging in anti-Western rhetoric for domestic political reasons.

The realistic views prevail in both capitals. They call for continued cooperation with Russia under any circumstances, believing that everything will turn out all right if the Kremlin is not criticized. Besides, the U.S. and Germany receive pressure from large business interests, which will benefit from their governments' leaving the Kremlin alone.

But by supporting the Magnitsky Act, the U.S. has made it clear that it is prepared to search for a new equilibrium between cooperation with Russia and a harsher stance toward the Kremlin's policies of suppressing society. Essentially, Congress has moved closer to creating a new paradigm of relations with kleptocratic regimes based on the principles of conditionality. Its position on suspected Russian human rights abusers is clear: Your ability to enjoy U.S. privileges will depend on how you behave at home.

Mirroring the U.S. approach, Berlin believes that it is possible to continue its usual cooperation with the Kremlin while also talking with the opposition. Last month, for example, when Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Moscow, she first signed agreements with the Kremlin and then had time left to shake hands with human rights activists. This ritual, it would seem, is related to public sentiments in Germany, but it won't persuade the Kremlin to clean up its act. Moreover, such "gesture politics" works against the Russian opposition and civil society, allowing the Kremlin to label them a fifth column.

How will the Putin regime react to the disillusionment in Washington and Berlin? It will probably not go after Western businesses for the simple reason that they are needed to help support the petrostate and its integration into the West. Meanwhile, Western--supported nongovernmental organizations will bear the brunt of the Russian regime's policies.

The Kremlin is telling the West that it will hold the opposition and civil society hostage. The government may retaliate by complicating foreign travel for opposition leaders. Indeed, why should opposition leaders Mikhail Kasyanov, Boris Nemtsov or Garry Kasparov have the privilege of traveling around the world if all they do is recklessly "defame" Putin?

The irony is that the distance between the West and Russia may actually help the Kremlin advance its foreign policy doctrine. It essentially says, "We will cooperate with you on the issues that are important to us — but on our terms." The doctrine seems old, but it does have a new twist. The Kremlin used to say that Russia is a democracy. Now it says Russia is a unique civilization that follows its own course.

Reticent Western cooperation will not stop the Kremlin from economic cooperation with the West. Russia will also retain its geopolitical role thanks to its cooperation with the West on security issues. At the same time, the regime will attempt to block any outside involvement in Russia's internal affairs while escalating its anti-Western rhetoric. Thus, the Soviet foreign policy model is being resurrected but with two differences. First, the Kremlin prefers soft containment to open confrontation. Second, the Russian ruling elite would much rather be integrated into the West than isolated.

The West's new approach will accelerate the splitting of Russia's ruling elite into those interested in open borders and those trying to retain their power at the expense of isolating Russia. Neither option is ideal. Nevertheless, the schism in the Russian elite is already a step toward a new reality. It will be up to the Russian opposition and civil society to create a state based on the rule of law rather than a new incarnation of an open state that integrates

the corrupt ruling elite into the West.

Thus, the new attitudes in Washington, Berlin and Brussels open a new window of opportunity for both the West and Russia. It is not clear, though, whether these attitudes will result in a new policy or a new imitation of the old one.

Lilia Shevtsova is senior associate at the Moscow Carnegie Center.

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