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Thesis Prospectus: “Challenging EU Solidarity?: German-Russian Relations”

The objective of my thesis is to analyze the European Union's ability to act with solidarity in foreign policy. After the success of the European Community, and later the European Union, in uniting a large part of the European continent economically through a customs union and a single market, one must wonder if this unification can be carried over into other fields such as foreign policy. The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) composes the second pillar of the EU<sup>1</sup> and differs from the first pillar (EC) in that it is not a supranational but rather intergovernmental institution, meaning that in order to reach a decision in foreign policy all member states must achieve unanimity<sup>2</sup>. Specifically in the formation of foreign policy, the results of intergovernmental decision making are said to be “inconsequential and weak” and represent the “lowest common denominator”<sup>3</sup>, which even the most reluctant member state is willing to accept. The implications of this reality directly affect the EU's status as a viable international actor. Karen Smith has stated that “the inconsistencies of EU policies, the lack of agreement to devote more resources to the pursuit of particular policies (and to external relations in general)...do not give the impression of a unified international actor that can expect to be effective.”<sup>4</sup> I am especially interested in researching EU foreign policy due to its importance in determining the fate of the EU's effectiveness and relevance as an international actor on the global stage.

There have been many theories concerning the EU's inability to achieve solidarity in foreign policy. Two main arguments are those of the intergovernmentalists and those of realists. While realists simply argue that international institutions, such as the European Union, cannot overcome limits to cooperation in foreign policy or otherwise, the intergovernmentalists believe that these institutions can actually promote cooperation, though only in so far as a nation can pursue its own interests through such institutions and only under the condition that said nation will gain from this cooperation.<sup>5</sup> Others argue that a lack of a common identity is the main obstacle in achieving EU unity and that foreign

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1 The first pillar being the European Community (EC) which deals mainly with economic issues, the third being Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) which deals with domestic and inter-European security issues.

2 As opposed to qualified majority voting (QMV) used in the first pillar

3 Smith, Karen. European Union Foreign Policy In a Changing World. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008. Second Edition., Pg. 10

4 Smith, Pg 238

5 See Smith, Pg. 11

policy is itself an expression of a communal identity, without which the EU will never be able to form or apply a legitimate foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> All of these arguments attempt to define and determine the limits of the EU in achieving unity. The simple truth is that member states reflect a great variety of foreign policy priorities within the EU.<sup>7</sup> Among the differences in priorities lies the role of pre-existing bilateral ties (or antipathies), and this factor will be the object of my research. With the use of a case study, the goal of my thesis will be to discern the extent to which the existence of bilateral relations between EU member states and third actors may cause a break down in EU solidarity in foreign policy formation, or if it may lead to the opposite outcome. Perhaps the EU has reached its limits and truly is, as some theories suggest, incapable of achieving unity between its members in foreign policy, but it is also possible that the process of foreign policy formation only needs reform and time in order to further develop.

In my case study of EU foreign policy I will discuss the Union's relations with Russia. The European Commissioner for trade, Peter Mandelson, has admitted that “No other country reveals our differences as does Russia. This is a failure of Europe as a whole, not any member state in particular.”<sup>8</sup> . In foreign relations, Russia has often demonstrated its ability to disregard the EU as an international actor by “dividing and conquering”<sup>9</sup> EU member states through bilateral agreements or disputes in a variety of sectors. The most notable examples of such agreements and disputes develop from Europe's undeniably high dependence on Russian energy supplies, an issue of great importance to Russia and to some EU members. Although energy is a very important issue in EU-Russian relations, geopolitics, economics, history and geography also play a role in determining any one EU member state's relations with Russia. Katinka Barysch stresses the pivotal role of individual EU member states in forming a secure foreign policy on Russia:

In the past, European leaders such as Gerhard Schröder, Silvio Berlusconi and Jaques Chirac happily discarded pre-agreed EU positions in their attempts to forge a special relationship with Russia. Such divisions have weakened the position of the EU, and allowed the Kremlin to assert that the EU cannot be taken seriously.<sup>10</sup>

If the EU could learn to act with unity towards Russia, not only would it gain a noteworthy international partner and see less conflict on the European continent, but it would also further advance its status as a viable international actor.

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6 See Smith, Pg 11

7 Bretherton, Charlotte and John Vogler. The European Union as a Global Actor. New York: Routledge, 2006. Second Edition. Pg. 162

8 Speech by Peter Mandelson, The EU and Russia: Our Joint Political Challenge, Bologna, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007

9 See Barysch, Katinka. “*The EU and Russia: Strategic Partners or squabbling neighbors?*” Center for European Reform Pamphlet, May 2004.

10 Barysch, Katinka. “*Russia, Realism, and EU Unity.*” Center for European Reform Pamphlet, July 2007. Pg. 2

In my case study I will look closely at the accusations that Germany's actions have been detrimental to EU foreign policy on Russia. As the largest and most powerful nation in the EU, Germany has often been accused of betraying the EU and hindering solidarity in foreign policy by playing a “two-level” game with Russia.<sup>11</sup> For instance, Poland has compared Germany's Nord Stream Pipeline energy deal with Gazprom to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, in which Russia and Germany agreed to divide up Poland after World War II.<sup>12</sup> Through this two-level game Germany uses its powers in the EU to criticize Russia's lack of democratic reform and to push for a normative agenda on EU-Russian relations, while at the same time conducting bilateral relations with Russia for more pragmatic issues such as energy and economic collaboration. In defense, Germany argues that it is not throwing aside the interests of the EU but rather promoting better relations between Russia and Europe through its bilateral relations. Germany's approach to Russia has been called “Wandel durch Verflechtung”<sup>13</sup>, or “change through interdependence”, an approach which originated in pre-EU policies between France and Germany so that the two countries were tied together through various European Communities to ensure that war was economically unfeasible. Germany hopes that a similar approach of “binding” Russia to Europe will lead Russians to be “drawn into their way of thinking”.<sup>14</sup>

Other nations like to approach Russia differently, namely through the “soft containment”<sup>15</sup> approach favored by Poland and the Baltic nations. These nations are themselves unsuccessful at dealing with Russia bilaterally and therefore try to “upload” their policies on Russia to the EU level in that they abide by EU imperatives to act with unity. Their approach, which calls for isolation of Russia until it reforms itself to fit EU norms, is not well thought out and would quickly crumble, damaging EU-Russian relations severely and discrediting the EU as an international actor. “What this approach ignores is the extent to which the European Union depends on cooperation with Russia to deal with issues in its neighborhood and on the global stage.”<sup>16</sup> Further criticism of this approach supposes that it could actually be causing a problem rather than providing a solution. Katinka Baysch admits:

For the EU, what happens inside Russia is of great importance. But it needs to stop pretending that it can somehow convert Russian to pluralism and liberalism. Such talk creates unrealistic

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11 See Timmis, Graham. “*German Ostpolitik Under the Red-Green Coalition and EU-Russian Relations.*” Debate. Volume 14, Number 3. December 2006. Pg 301-314, Pg. 301, and “*German-Russian Bilateral Relations and EU Policy on Russia: Reconciling the Two Level Game?*”. Russia and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: An Uneasy Partnership. Jackie Gower and Graham Timmins. London: Anthem Press, 2007. Pg. 169-184.

12 Schmidt-Felzmann, Anke. “*All for One? EU Member States and the Union's Common Policy Towards the Russian Federation.*” Journal of Contemporary European Studies. Vol. 16, No. 2. August 2008. Pgs. 169-187. Pg. 76.

13 Leonard, Mark and Nicu Popescu. “*A Power Audit of EU-Russian Relations.*” European Council on Foreign Relations. November 2, 2007.

14 Leonard & Popescu, Pg. 52

15 Leonard & Popescuu, Pg 51

16 Leonard & Popescu, Pg. 51

expectations in Europe and fuels resentment in Russia.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, Germany's approach is to include Russia in its business, economic, and energy deals in hopes that this will one day transform Russia into a reliable neighbor. This hope is loosely based on the methodology of pre-EU European integration, which started with the European Coal and Steel Community, where once individual member states began working with one another they began to trust one another and therefore became able to give up national competencies to the supranational EU level. Russia is of course very different from EU nations in many ways and for this reason such a strategy cannot be expected to work or necessarily provide the same results as it has for the EU, especially since Russia is unwilling to forfeit national sovereignty at any level. Also of great importance is the fact that the EU's two best foreign policy tools are 1) to offer access or denial of its market to other nations and 2) its ability to offer membership into the EU. In Russia's case, the second option, although possible, is highly unlikely, and therefore a lack of incentive prevents the EU from dealing with Russia as it has dealt with other European nations.

In my thesis I want to analyze Germany's bilateral relations with Russia and attempt to determine if they are truly preventing the EU from achieving solidarity in its foreign policy with Russia, or if Germany's approach to Russia could actually provide a model for the EU to follow. Germany seems to be promoting a more pragmatic approach to Russia, one which does not rely on Russia to reform itself before the EU takes action, but one which is also hesitant to criticize Russia outside of its actions within the EU. The extent to which Germany is willing to turn a blind eye to undemocratic practices in Russia, which Chancellor Schröder was most famous for, will also be evaluated in my research, as it has been the cause of much distress to those who advocate a value based normative approach of the EU. It is critical to understand if the furthering of EU-Russian relations, least to say German-Russian relations, is worth overlooking current Russian realities by EU member states.

In attempting to answer the question of whether German-Russian bilateral relations are helping or hindering EU solidarity in foreign policy I will look at the actions and policies taken by Germany when it held the EU presidency as well as the role it has played in major EU-Russian agreements. EU strategies such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994) and the Common Strategy (1999) will be discussed for their lack of substance and poor results in EU-Russian relations. The bilateral agreements made between Germany and Russia such as the Nord Stream Pipeline will be analyzed for their effectiveness in achieving goals with Russia and in bringing Russia into Europe's sphere as a true

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<sup>17</sup> Bayrsch, 2007, Pg. 4

international partner. In evaluating the relevant actions and policies I will attempt to discern whether Germany's actions have prevented the EU from reaching solidarity in foreign policy or whether these actions have actually proven to be more affective in brining Russia into the reaches of EU foreign policy.

In my analysis I argue that the reason Germany is able to conduct such bilateral agreements with Russia is due to its size, history, and geopolitical relationship with Russia. Other nations are unable or uninterested in forming such relationships with Russia for the reason that they either 1) lack the economic strength and political power of Germany or 2) are not individually dependent on Russian energy. Russia's own mentality also plays greatly into this situation, seeing itself as a sovereign state and seeking to make agreements with other sovereign states, as opposed to making agreements with institutions such as the European Union. Fyodor Lukyannov put it well in saying, "Russia is bitterly seeking recognition as a European nation and is offended by Europe's reluctance to recognize it as such."<sup>18</sup> Due to this reality, Russia naturally seeks out the strongest of the EU member states, meaning those which exhibit the largest economic and political weight on the international scale, and pursues bilateral agreements with these nations. Therefore Germany, unlike every EU member state, has been said to play a key role in Russia's foreign policy strategy.<sup>19</sup> Under such conditions it is obvious how nations such as Poland or Latvia cannot gain Russia's full attention and therefore these nations are known for using the European Union and its institutions for achieving their desired relations with and policies on Russia. I suggests that such nations have caused more problems in hindering EU solidarity on Russia in that their actions on the EU level are what actually promote larger, able member states, such as Germany, to bypass the EU, where progress is slow, and conduct bilateral relations with Russia.

"Russia has become a test case for the enlarged EU's ability to formulate and follow a coherent foreign policy."<sup>20</sup> The outcome of my thesis should determine whether Germany itself is holding back solidarity on EU-Russian relations or if it is doing just the opposite. If it is indeed the case that Germany has been holding back EU foreign policy and needs to change its approach to Russia, I want to investigate whether Germany itself is willing to make such changes. I will also consider and analyze the possibility that the EU itself needs to rethink its approach on Russia and possibly to take Germany's advice and examples by conducting more pragmatic and less normative relations with Russia. My analysis should shed light on whether and how the EU could finally reach solidarity in foreign policy

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18 Lukyanov, Fyodor. "Russia-EU: The Partnership That Went Astray". Europe-Asia Studies. Vol. 60, No. 6. August 2008. Pg. 1107-1119, Pg. 1118

19 Rahr, Alexander. "Russia-European Union-Germany After September 11 and Iraq" Russia's Engagement with the West. Alexander J. Motyl, Blair A. Ruble, Lilia Shevtsove. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2005. Pg 223-237, Pg. 231

20 Baysch, 2007 Pg. 8

on Russia, but will also investigate the possibility that Germany is currently exposing the limits of EU foreign policy and what this means for the EU itself, the member states, and third actors.

An article in the Economist asks the question: “Will the benefits of European unity ever trump the pursuit of national interests when it comes to Russia?”<sup>21</sup> My thesis attempts to answer this question with another question: Are bilateral relations really hindering EU unity or is true EU unity in itself out of reach?

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21 The Economist: *Charlemagne-The European Union and Russia*. Volume 388, Issue 8595, 2008.

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