

Sabine Adler

Ukraine and Its Western Allies

Germany's Failure and the Necessary Lessons for the Future

With a foreword by Andreas Umland

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Cover picture: The gas leak at Nord Stream 2 seen from the Danish F-16 interceptor on Bornholm.

Source: Forsvaret / Danish Defence

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Foreword

by Andreas Umland

When the German version of this book, under the original title “Ukraine and Us” (i.e. the Germans), was published in autumn 2022 by Ch. Links Press in Berlin, this was an event by itself in Germany. Sabine Adler’s critical review of Berlin’s Ukraine policy represented then and still represents today a landmark in German political publicism. These are some reviews of the book’s German edition in a number of influential German media:

- “A dramatically revealing book” – Christian Thomas for *Frankfurter Rundschau*;
- “An authoritative contribution to enlighten [the readership about German-Ukrainian relations]” – Natascha Freundel for *RBB Kulturradio*;
- “Adler evaluates [Germany’s relationship to Ukraine] with wisdom and the sharpness of a razor” – Viola Schenz for *Süddeutsche Zeitung*;
- “Adler manages with her book to hold a mirror up to us. She points out the errors in [our] thinking.” – Paul Toetzke for *Liberale Moderne*;
- “This book explains a lot. You will be wiser afterwards.” – Jörg Thadeusz for *WDR 2*;
- “This [book] might be unique at the [current] moment, with its degree of depth and sharpness.” – Bernd Schekausti for *MDR Kultur*.¹

Adler’s study was in 2022 and remains in 2023 one of the most consequential contributions to the currently ongoing German rethinking of the so-called *Ostpolitik* (literally: Eastern Policy) after the end of the Cold War. The German attitude towards Eastern Europe, in turn, has been one of the most significant international relations in

1 Source: “Die Ukraine und wir: Deutschlands Versagen und die Lehren für die Zukunft Gebundene Ausgabe–16. August 2022 von Sabine Adler,” *Amazon.de*, <https://www.amazon.de/Die-Ukraine-wir-Deutschlands-Versagen/dp/3962891803/>.

Europe as a whole—in the past and until today. It will co-determine much of Europe’s future. It thus made sense to provide a wider public outside Germany with an English translation of Adler’s seminal study.

Like myself, Adler is an East and not West German with considerable life experience in the former Soviet bloc (we both studied, in different periods, at the Journalism Section of the then Karl Marx University of Leipzig). With her background in the GDR, Adler brings to the table a somewhat, in comparison to West Germans, different background and viewpoint on Russia, Ukraine, and Germany’s role in Eastern Europe. In her particularly long and strong skepticism towards Putin, as well as her explicit sympathy for Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, Adler joins a number of further influential German analysts of Eastern Europe with a biography in East Germany.² They include, among several others, the late Werner Schulz who was a long-term member of both the German and European parliaments for the German Green party, Stefan Meister of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), Jörg Forbrig of the German Marshall Fund (GMFUS), and Andre Härtel of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). Like these analysts, Adler has, for more than two decades now, been among those German experts on Eastern Europe who have, with their written publications and oral interventions, prepared the recent radical turn in Berlin’s attitude to Russia and Ukraine.

Readers should keep in mind that Adler’s book was originally written not for a foreign, but for a German-reading audience. It addressed especially readers among the political and intellectual elites of the Federal Republic, and, in particular, those living or working in Berlin. It is also not the only such recent German book which critically reviews German policies towards Russia and East Central Europe. Several important new studies by various journalists have come out after the start of the famous *Zeitenwende* (change

2 See, for instance: Jörg Thadeusz, “Sabine Adler - Journalistin und Expertin für Osteuropa,” *WDR 2*, 30 January 2023. <https://www1.wdr.de/mediathek/audio/wdr2/joerg-thadeusz/audio-sabine-adler---journalistin-und-expertin-fuer-ost-europa-100.html>.

of times) in February 2022. Among the most important and deep additional such studies are, in chronological order of their appearance:

- Thomas Urban, *Verstellter Blick: Die deutsche Ostpolitik* [Biased View: The German Eastern Policy]. Berlin: Tapeta, 2022;
- Michael Thumann, *Revanche: Wie Putin das bedrohlichste Regime der Welt geschaffen hat* [Revanche: How Putin Created the Most Dangerous Regime of the World]. München: C.H. Beck, 2023;
- Reinhard Bingener and Markus Wehner, *Die Moskau-Connection: Das Schröder-Netzwerk und Deutschlands Weg in die Abhängigkeit* [The Moscow Connection: The Schroeder Network and Germany's Path to Dependence]. München: C.H. Beck, 2023;
- Winfried Schneider-Deters, *Russlands Ukrainekrieg und die Bundesrepublik: Deutsche Debatten um Frieden, Faschismus und Kriegsverbrechen, 2022-2023* [Russia's Ukraine War and the Federal Republic: German Debates on Peace, Fascism and War Crimes, 2022-23]. Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2023 (forthcoming).

Yet, Adler's study represents, as of June 2023 when this foreword was written, still the only such German book specifically focusing on Ukrainian-German relations within *Ostpolitik*. Moreover, she has written not an academic study, but a book for a broader audience. Her investigation should thus be of interest also to a non-German and wider readership interested in the evolution of Berlin's position vis-à-vis Kyiv and Moscow. It constitutes a vivid illustration, documentation, and interpretation of recent German debates, concepts and policies regarding the Ukrainian state, security in Eastern Europe, and the Russian threat. Whoever wants to understand the past, current, and future German relationship with Ukraine needs to read Adler's book.

Stockholm, 11 June 2023

Introduction to the English edition

When Europeans woke up on February 24, 2022, a war raged in Europe. Many think the first war since 1945, having forgotten the Balkan wars of the early 1990s and the war in eastern Ukraine that has been going on since 2014. Now Putin's troops are attacking Ukraine from many directions; towns everywhere are being shelled with rockets, and tanks are moving in. A full-scale invasion is underway. Western military experts have long observed that more and more Russian troops are stationed on the Ukraine border. The US had warned the public in detail months in advance. The German government, the European Union, and the United States did their best to dissuade Vladimir Putin from his increasingly aggressive course toward Ukraine and NATO. But in response to Ukraine's immediate need and request for help, Germany was late and persistently hesitant.

How could this escalation have happened? What have we overlooked? What mistakes were made in Germany and the European Union? These questions have been hotly debated in public since the beginning of the war and are the focus of this book. To answer them, looking only at the current situation is not enough. For that, it is also necessary to look back into history. Not only to 2014, when Putin occupied Crimea and fueled the war in eastern Ukraine, not only to 2013, when Ukraine refused to sign the EU Association Agreement, or till 2008 when Ukraine and Georgia were denied accession to NATO. And even beyond 2005, the year in which Chancellor Gerhard Schröder launched the first Nord Stream project with Vladimir Putin. It is necessary to look back even further: to the Chechen wars, to the collapse of the Soviet Union, of which not only Russia remained, but 14 successor states of the USSR, and of course, to the Second World War, from which Germany's responsibility for Ukraine arises in a very special way. It has not been fully recognized until today.

I have observed the developments of the past 25 years as a correspondent from Russia, Ukraine, and Berlin. This regular change of perspective between Germany and Eastern Europe has

shaped my perception of our relationship with troubled Ukraine.
This book will also discuss this issue.

Berlin, May 2023