

Ernst REICHEL,
*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the Federal Republic of Germany to Ukraine
(2016–2019)*

HIGH-PROFILE VISITS OF GERMAN OFFICIALS TO UKRAINE IN 2018 – A STRONG SIGN OF GERMANY’S SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE’S REFORM AGENDA

Germany and Ukraine looked back on 100 years of diplomatic relations in 2018. Today, Germany is proud to call itself one of Ukraine’s most reliable and important partners and friends. As one of the first countries to recognize Ukrainian independence in 1991, Germany was swift to provide assistance wherever needed – whether in the first challenging years after Ukraine’s independence or in the aftermath of the ‘Revolution of Dignity’ in 2014. Through technical, financial, cultural and civil society cooperation, our two countries have developed a dense network of relations at economic, political and also personal level.

Indeed, Ukraine is a high priority partner for Germany today. Germany provides long-term and in-depth technical and financial assistance in the areas of energy efficiency, economic development and infrastructure, decentralization and local self-government, rule of law and fight against corruption, as well as education, science and media. Since 2014, Germany has allocated 685 million euros in development cooperation, of which 218 million euros were granted to humanitarian aid projects. Germany and Ukraine have built ever stronger trade relations: more than 1,000 German companies are present in Ukraine, making Germany one of the largest investors into Ukraine.

In 2018, several official visits at the highest level sent another strong signal of Germany’s support to Ukraine:

1. Visit of the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, May 29–30, 2018

The President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, kicked off the diplomatic relay of top level officials to Ukraine. Even though it was his first visit in his position as President, Steinmeier has an intimate personal history with the country dating back to his former position as Federal Foreign Minister from 2013–2017 and OSCE Chairman-in-Office in 2016. After the ‘Revolution of Dignity’ in 2014, which was followed by Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the start of armed conflict in the Donbass region, Steinmeier had

dedicated tremendous efforts to stabilizing the country. During numerous visits and night-long negotiations, he had facilitated emergency assistance as well as talks between the parties to the conflict in Donbass, which paved the way for the establishment of the Trilateral Contact Group consisting of the OSCE, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Ukraine's struggle for peace and prosperity is still continuing and so is Germany's commitment to support, was Steinmeier's main message.

The schedule of Steinmeier's two-day visit was packed with high-level meetings. In his extensive encounter with President Poroshenko, the two statesmen discussed issues related to the armed conflict in the Donbass region. They agreed that the Normandy Format (a format established in June 2014 which consists of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine) shall be reactivated, that prospects of an international peacekeeping mission for the Donbass were to be explored and that Ukrainian detainees in Crimea and in Russia must be released. In his meeting with Prime Minister Hroysman, the growing business relations and prospects for further investment were discussed. The trade volume between Germany and Ukraine stands at 6.6 billion euros, second only to China, with Germany being also among the five largest investors in Ukraine.

But for Steinmeier, this visit was also an opportunity to get in touch with young Ukrainians and to promote contact between civil societies. During a visit of a secondary school with enhanced German language teaching in Kyiv's Obolon district, Steinmeier discussed with German-speaking pupils from all over Ukraine. There are few countries where as many people are learning German as in Ukraine: far more than 700,000. During a speech at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Steinmeier evoked the events of February 2014 as he had experienced them in person, and called for the unbreakable, solidary 'civic spirit', which had left the deepest impression on him, not to faint, but to keep up the fight against corruption and isolationist nationalism. 'It is important not to allow what was achieved by the Maidan to fail', Steinmeier told the students, cautioning that internal resignation might just be the main obstacle of the country's way towards peace and prosperity. Thus, he encouraged Ukrainian society to follow through with domestic reforms, as hard as they may seem and as strong the opposition might prove, and promised that 'whatever Germany can do to help, we want to offer you as true friends'.

But Steinmeier's view on German-Ukrainian relations went beyond the events of 2014, to a period of hostility and atrocities, for which Germany has to bear historical responsibility. Thus, Steinmeier paid his respects to the World War II Memorial of the Unknown Soldier in Kyiv. And in Lviv, Steinmeier met with representatives of the Jewish Community at the memorial for the destroyed Golden Rose Synagogue. This memorial, a public space in the historical city centre, has been created as part of an extensive municipal development and rehabilitation project by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ).

2. Visit of Federal Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, May 31 – June 1st 2018

Only hours after the departure of President Steinmeier, Heiko Maas paid his first visit to Ukraine since assuming office as Federal Foreign Minister of Germany. Maas made sure to back the commitment of President Steinmeier and to follow up with concrete measures to be taken. While Steinmeier had highlighted the need for internal reforms as a way forward to safeguard the achievements of the Maidan revolution, Maas also stressed that Germany has indeed not forgotten the armed conflict still raging along the contact line in the Donbass region.

Accordingly, Maas sat down with President Poroshenko to explore concrete steps to facilitate peace. In this regard, Maas announced that the countries of the Normandy Format would hold their first meeting since 2016 only two weeks later, on June 11, 2018, in Berlin. Maas underlined that sanctions against Russia would only be lifted if and when Russia would be cooperating with regard to implementing the Minsk agreements, which, he insisted, are the only way of ensuring a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Ending the bloodshed on European soil is of the utmost importance for Germany. For this reason, Maas and his Ukrainian counterpart Pavlo Klimkin undertook a journey to the frontline of the conflict: after flying by helicopter to Mariupol, they travelled with a patrol of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to the village of Berdyanske, only a few kilometers from the line of contact, where villagers told them about their daily hardships and their desperate hope for peace. Later, the two ministers saw the former resort town of Shyrokyne, which had been completely destroyed by fighting in 2015. Heiko Maas was deeply moved by the scale of destruction and despair. ‘We will not forget you’, he emphasized. He assured the Ukrainians that the German public, as well as the international community, keeps following closely the events in the Donbas: ‘We stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people.’

3. Visit of Chancellor Angela Merkel on November 1st, 2018

For the past five years, Chancellor Merkel has shown outstanding personal engagement and commitment in pursuing the peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in the Donbass region and in backing the efforts of the Ukrainian people towards a more democratic and prosperous country. Under her leadership, Germany has taken a decisive role in deescalating the conflict in the Donbass and in stabilizing Ukraine’s macroeconomic situation. The German Advisory Group to Ukraine, which Merkel helped to establish, has been relentless in its efforts to assist with structural reforms in accordance with the EU Association Agreement. Thus Merkel could reassure her Ukrainian counterparts of the importance Germany continues to attach to the bilateral relationship.



Канцлерка Німеччини Ангела Меркель під час зустрічі в Київському національному університеті імені Тараса Шевченка

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany during the meeting in Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

After the traditional reception with bread and salt at Boryspil airport by Kyiv's mayor Vitaly Klitschko, Chancellor Merkel was received with military honors at the Mariyinsky Palace by President Poroshenko.

Chancellor Merkel considers the armed conflict in Donbass to be the greatest security challenge since the end of the Cold War for Europe. Accordingly, discussions with President Poroshenko focused on the need for progress in implementing the Minsk agreements. Merkel confirmed Germany's determination to extend EU sanctions against Russia due to the inertia of the Kremlin and its apparent unwillingness to fulfill its commitment under the agreements. In this regard Merkel strongly criticized the planned "elections" in the non-government controlled areas of Donbass, which were scheduled for November 11, 2018.

Chancellor Merkel recalled that due to stalled progress on the Minsk agreements, the humanitarian situation of the affected civilian population in eastern Ukraine continued to deteriorate. And even in regions where basic needs were being fulfilled, people still needed a better social perspective. Accordingly, Merkel pledged that Germany, which is already the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, will provide additional 85 million euros, inter alia for vocational training purposes and IDP housing projects. More-

over, Ukrainian soldiers who were injured on the contact line will continue to receive treatment in German military hospitals, the Chancellor promised.

The Chancellor backed the idea to continue discussions on a UN peacekeeping mission, which Steinmeier and Maas had already put forward – emphasizing that such a mission must have a mandate to operate in the entire territory of eastern Ukraine, including the non-government controlled areas.

In Merkel's meeting with Prime Minister Hroysman, mainly bilateral and economic issues were raised. The chancellor encouraged her Ukrainian counterpart to implement necessary and already agreed reforms more rigorously. Germany would continue to assist in this challenging process, inter alia by prolonging the mandate of Special Envoy Georg Milbradt, who since August 2017 advises the Ukrainian side on the decentralization process, good governance and public service reform. The Chancellor also announced that in line with the German Action Plan for Ukraine, Germany will further expand its development cooperation with Ukraine.

In frank and open discussions with the faction leaders of the Verkhovna Rada, Merkel readily addressed Ukrainian concerns about the pipeline project North Stream 2. Merkel explained the rationale behind this multinational economic project, while reassuring MPs that it is Germany's paramount interest that Ukraine will stay an important gas transit country.

Chancellor Merkel paid tribute to the victims of the "Revolution of Dignity" at the "Heavenly Hundred" memorial on Kyiv's Maidan Square, thereby expressing her solidarity and admiration for the struggle of Ukrainians for freedom and democracy. She then proceeded to a discussion panel with students at Taras Shevchenko University, where she faced pertinent questions about bilateral relations, on the future of politics in the age of growing populism and on her own political future. The experienced leader encouraged her young audience to keep on searching for the truth and not to be lured by populist promises.