Fifteen years ago, at the University of Warsaw, I completed and defended a master’s thesis titled “Strategic German-Russian Cooperation in the Field of Energy Security.” The study examined the evolving relationship between Berlin and Moscow – a dynamic that, from a transatlantic perspective, directly affected NATO cohesion and U.S. strategic interests in Central Europe.

In 2010, I argued that the so-called strategic partnership between Germany and Russia was inherently asymmetrical – grounded in shared economic interests but divergent political goals. In practice, it strengthened Russia’s position in Europe at the expense of regional security and Western unity. [1]

In October 2025, these words gained renewed relevance. In a widely discussed interview with the Hungarian platform Partizán, former Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed that the opposition of Poland and the Baltic States to the proposed EU-Russia dialogue in 2021 had “complicated Europe’s ability to build a coherent strategy toward Moscow.” [2] Many observers interpreted her remarks as an attempt to shift the moral responsibility for the war’s escalation eastward, although Merkel herself never used such wording.

The interview, widely debated in Vilnius, Riga, and Warsaw, revealed that Germany’s political elites still struggle to come to terms with their own energy policy legacy. [3] The failures were not the result of ignorance, but of unwillingness – an unwillingness to abandon commercial naïveté and to recognize that energy sovereignty, not market integration, defines real security.

What Europe called a “strategic partnership” was, in fact, a transfer of strategic autonomy from democratic institutions to authoritarian leverage – a dynamic that Poland had identified and warned against fifteen years earlier. [4]

The Strategic Partnership – Origins of a Flawed Concept (1998-2010)

After 1998, Germany shaped its energy policy around the concept of Wandel durch Handel – “change through trade.” Its underlying assumption was that Russia could be integrated into the Western order through economic engagement. Commerce, it was believed, would civilize authoritarianism, and mutual dependence would restrain aggression.

In 2010, I assessed this strategy as follows:

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"It is therefore not surprising that Germany assigns such importance to the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline and seeks to secure its future supplies – even at the cost of deepening dependence on Russian gas."

This assessment contrasted sharply with the dominant tone in Berlin at the time. Germany officially treated energy policy as a technocratic field, detached from strategic considerations. Yet, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it laid the foundations of a structural asymmetry – through long-term contracts with Gazprom, the creation of joint infrastructure ventures (including Wingas and Nord Stream AG), and a direct transmission link across the Baltic Sea.

Nord Stream 1, launched in 2005, marked a turning point. The first pipeline became operational in 2011 and the second in 2012. Each had a capacity of up to 27.5 billion cubic meters per year, designed to become the main route for Russian gas deliveries to Germany. [5] As I wrote in my thesis:

"Nord Stream seeks excessively to present itself as a joint European project, while in fact involving only a narrow group of states and benefiting primarily the economies of Germany and Russia. (…) The pipeline was granted TEN-E status by the European Commission – a designation meant to imply strategic importance for all EU members – but in reality, it undermined regional solidarity and cooperation."

From today's perspective, this can be seen as an early warning of a systemic error. Nord Stream, presented as a "diversification project," was in fact a bypass of European solidarity – circumventing Poland and the Baltic States while reinforcing Germany's position as the central gas broker within the EU.

This mechanism of "commercialized security policy" is now recognized as a textbook case of strategic asymmetry. Russia viewed energy as an instrument of influence; Germany saw it as a source of economic advantage. For Central Europe, it meant marginalization in decision-making and increased vulnerability to pressure.

Nord Stream – The Infrastructure of Dependence (2010-2022)

In 2010, I also argued that *"given the significance of Russian gas imports for Germany's energy balance, cooperation between Berlin and Moscow remains a crucial component of German gas policy. (…) From the German perspective, engagement in this project serves two key goals – to diversify and expand gas imports from Russia, and, equally important, to increase Germany's export*

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capacity."

Nord Stream 1, with a total annual capacity of 55 billion cubic meters, became operational between 2011 and 2012. According to Eurostat data, cited also by German industry associations, more than 50 percent of Germany's total gas consumption in 2020-2021 came from Russia, supplied primarily through this very route. [6] Marketed as a guarantee of "reliable and affordable" supplies, the project ultimately became the foundation of Germany's energy dependence.

After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, cooperation with Moscow was not curtailed – on the contrary, construction of Nord Stream 2 began in 2018 despite criticism from the European Commission and Central European governments. It is worth noting that successive U.S. administrations, backed by bipartisan support in Congress, opposed the project from the outset, adopting a series of sanctions in 2017, 2019, and 2020. [7] Washington's consistency – often criticized in Europe – ultimately proved prescient, confirming that strategic clarity is not arrogance but foresight.

Nevertheless, the new pipeline – with the same 55 bcm annual capacity – was completed in September 2021, but never became operational. In February 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the German government suspended the project's certification process. [8]

In September 2022, both pipelines – Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 – were destroyed in an act of sabotage off the coast of Bornholm. The symbolic meaning of that event was unmistakable: the physical destruction of the pipelines marked the end of an era of illusions. [9]

In 2010, I warned that without a genuine common energy policy, the European Union would remain a collection of national interests – a system where the strong could exploit the weak under the pretext of integration. [10]

A decade later, this warning proved sadly accurate. Germany's energy policy – endorsed by the European Commission under the TEN-E framework – effectively eroded solidarity and trust within the EU. When Russia weaponized gas supplies in 2022, the system built on the "single energy market" collapsed within weeks.

The Nord Stream sabotage was therefore not merely a technical catastrophe but also a symbol of the end of Germany's energy hegemony in Europe. The task ahead

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is not to soften judgment, but to rebuild credibility – through real resilience, not declarations: hydrogen corridors, shared storage, and interoperable grids. A partnership once intended to cement peace had, in the end, become a vehicle for financing war in Ukraine.

Zeitenwende – The Reckoning for an Illusion (2022-2025)

After February 24, 2022, Germany lost two things – its energy security footing and its moral authority. What Poland, the Baltic States, and Scandinavia had been warning about for a decade suddenly became self-evident.

The Zeitenwende announced by Chancellor Olaf Scholz was meant to mark a turning point. In practice, it became a reckoning for an illusion. Germany rushed to construct LNG terminals in Wilhelmshaven, Brunsbüttel, and Lubmin – the first of which was completed in December 2022, after only 194 days of construction. [11] Berlin introduced compensation mechanisms for its industrial sector to offset the spike in energy prices, while simultaneously upholding its decision to close the country's last three nuclear power plants in April 2023.

In reality, Zeitenwende marked the collapse of the post-Cold War liberal assumption that trade ensures peace – an illusion long rejected by strategic realists on both sides of the Atlantic. Economic interdependence does not civilize authoritarian regimes; it subsidizes them.

In 2025, the government of Chancellor Friedrich Merz began implementing an energy law reform aimed at simplifying investment procedures and granting hydrogen projects the status of "overriding public interest." [12] Yet German industry continues to suffer the consequences of earlier decisions: in the second half of 2024, the average industrial electricity price reached €0.20 per kWh, compared with just $0.08-0.09 per kWh in the United States. [13][14] Poland also faced price shocks in 2022-2023, but system stability and diversified supply prevented structural damage.

Poland, by contrast, entered the crisis with a fully prepared infrastructure – the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, the Baltic Pipe, expanded gas storage facilities, and long-term LNG contracts with the United States and Qatar. By 2025, Poland not only meets its own demand but also exports gas to Ukraine and neighboring countries. Operators GAZ-SYSTEM and GTSOU extended the enhanced capacity of their interconnection until September 2026, further strengthening supply stability and

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contributing to Ukraine's energy security. [15]

This outcome was not accidental but a result of prudent, state-centric planning – a conservative approach to governance that valued resilience over ideology. In the American sense, it reflected an understanding that markets serve nations, not the other way around.

Europe's dependence on Russian gas – which accounted for over 40 percent of EU imports in 2021 – fell to around 11-12 percent by 2024. Including LNG, Russia's overall share in the EU's gas imports now stands below 19 percent. [16]

As a result, the very countries that had long warned against the "politics of dependence" – Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – are now building the foundations of Europe's new energy security architecture.

The Polish Perspective – Being Right Without Satisfaction

For years, Poland and the Baltic States were marginalized – and often lectured – In this debate. In Western discourse, opposition to Nord Stream was portrayed as a sign of "insufficient European maturity" or even "Russophobia." In reality, it was an effort to defend the principle of energy solidarity – a principle that the European Union had embraced on paper but failed to implement in practice. [17]

These words have lost none of their relevance. In 2025, Poland stands among the few EU member states that weathered the 2022-2024 energy crisis without lasting damage to its energy system or economy. From the very beginning, Poland's strategy was built on the principle of diversification of both sources and routes – a principle I identified fifteen years ago:

"It is therefore unsurprising that the Polish government, in its Energy Policy of Poland to 2030 adopted in November 2009, identified diversification of supply sources and directions as the main objective of its natural gas strategy."

In practice, this principle translated into tangible action: the construction of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście (commissioned in 2015), the Baltic Pipe project (launched in 2022, with a capacity of 10 bcm per year), the development of interconnections with Lithuania (GIPL, 2022) and Slovakia (2022), and the expansion of domestic storage capacities.

As a result, Poland was able to cut itself off from Russian gas independently of the

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2022 invasion – becoming one of the first EU states to do so. In 2019, PGNiG formally notified its intention to terminate the Yamal contract by 2022. [18] By 2025, the country not only maintains full energy security but has become a net gas exporter in the region – supplying fuel to Ukraine and supporting the Baltic States through reverse-flow interconnections.

At the same time, Poland adopted a more integrated security strategy – linking energy policy with defense and foreign affairs. Cooperation with the United States on the nuclear power program (Westinghouse, 2024) and the development of SMR technologies are laying the foundations for long-term systemic resilience. [19] For Washington, Poland's model translates into reliable LNG offtake, NATO-aligned infrastructure, and a nuclear partnership that anchors U.S. supply chains in Europe.

Security is not a function of the market, but of the state's ability to act independently in times of crisis. [20] This sentence could well serve as the motto of Poland's security strategy today. President Karol Nawrocki and the Polish government continue to strengthen the doctrine of responsible sovereignty – combining an Atlantic orientation with regional leadership. Poland no longer needs to prove it was right; its task now is to turn that rightness into a lasting state doctrine.

Strategic Lessons – The Doctrine of Responsible Sovereignty

The experience of 2000-2025 demonstrates that energy security is not a technical subsystem of the economy, but a fundamental pillar of national sovereignty. The collapse of the German-Russian "strategic partnership" and the success of Poland's diversification policy now serve as source material for a new doctrine of regional resilience. It is therefore beyond dispute that:

1.**Energy security is a function of policy, not markets.**
Nord Stream was a political project sold as an economic one. Every infrastructure decision – a pipeline, an LNG terminal, and an interconnector – carries strategic consequences. Basing security on market logic produces dependency, not stability. [21]

2. **Partnerships with autocracies are inherently asymmetrical.**
Russia used energy as a tool of coercion; Germany treated it as an instrument of economic dominance within the EU. After 2022, both strategies collapsed: Russia

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lost its primary markets, and Germany lost its credibility as Europe's "leader." [22]

3. **Markets do not replace resilience.**
In 2022, when gas prices in the EU skyrocketed, the market system collapsed. Only those states with reserves, diversified sources, and sovereign regulatory decisions – Poland, Finland, and Lithuania – remained secure. Resilience requires market design with security backstops – capacity, storage, and stress-tested interconnectors.

4. **Poland's national interest is not Russophobia – It is experience.**
Historical experience, institutional memory, and a realistic assessment of threats form the foundation of Poland's strategy. National interest means the ability to combine sovereignty with solidarity – without illusions toward partners, yet without isolationism.

5. **Central Europe must build a shared system of resilience.**
The countries of the Three Seas Initiative and the Bucharest Nine now have a real opportunity to create a "security corridor" – from the Baltic to the Black Sea – built on gas, energy, and defense infrastructure. Regional integration, supported by the United States and NATO, remains the strongest guarantee of stability amid Berlin's uncertainty and Moscow's revisionism. The Three Seas Initiative, if backed by sustained U.S. engagement, can become the backbone of a transatlantic resilience network – the conservative alternative to centralized technocracy in Brussels.

Conclusion

The German-Russian strategic partnership was meant to guarantee stability. Instead, it became one of the key causes of the greatest security crisis in Europe since the Cold War. What was a warning in 2010 has become a reality in 2025.

If the security of Central Europe is once again subordinated to the economic logic of the continent's largest players, the region's states will lose their political agency – a risk I described in 2010 as the marginalization of smaller nations in favor of a "strategic partner." [23] That fifteen-year-old conclusion now serves as an epitaph for the Nord Stream era. Poland was right – but being right is only the beginning. The task of the state is to turn experience into strategy, and analysis into institution.

As a frontline NATO state and a pillar of regional security, Poland now has the duty to transform that rightness into a doctrine of responsible sovereignty – one built on

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economic strength, affordable energy, modern armed forces, and a genuine partnership with the United States.

For both Warsaw and Washington, this partnership is not merely transactional – It is foundational. True transatlantic partnership means mutual responsibility – not dependency. It must rest on sovereign strength, not bureaucratic consensus. It rests on a shared belief that liberty, sovereignty, and strength are inseparable. Because true security is not born of declarations – but of consequences.

All quotations highlighted in the text are drawn from:

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