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SCHOLAR OUTLINES HOW GERMANY IS STRENGTHENING ITS LEADERSHIP ROLE

Germany’s historical role during the Nazi period in Ukraine and the Holocaust have shaped its reticent policies in Europe in recent decades, but it is beginning to step more forcefully into a leadership role, an expert on Germany told members of the Naples Council on World Affairs.

A distinguished faculty member at George Washington University, Dr. Hope Harrison, delivered a lecture, “The New Germany,” examining Germany's reactions to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the reverberations of the Hamas-Israel War, explaining the historical ties that bind Germany to these regions and its evolving domestic and foreign policies.

Dr. Harrison's in-depth exploration of Germany's post-World War II relations with the Soviet Union and Russia took the audience on a journey through the Cold War era to the recent challenges posed by Russia's actions in Ukraine, leading Germany to evaluate its global responsibilities.

"The German (World War II) attack on the Soviet Union went directly through what was then Soviet Ukraine,” she said. “In the process of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in Soviet Ukraine, three and a half million civilians were killed."

A more recent concern is that "Germany and Russia are separated only by Poland. It takes about 13 hours to drive from the German border across Poland to the Ukrainian border. Thirteen hours is very close. The war has led to massive changes in German policies," said Dr. Harrison.

Dr. Harrison highlighted the significant role Germany played in trying to mediate between Russia and Ukraine to avoid conflict, diplomatic efforts that preceded the Russian invasion. When mediation failed, the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted Germany to reassess its energy sources and navigate the complexities of global sanctions. After the conflict broke out, Germany faced economic repercussions. "The reduction of the key energy supplies from Russia led to increased costs of most things. Inflation reached the highest it had been since World War II a year ago when it was 10.4 percent," said Dr. Harrison.

“Nord Stream 2 was constructed from 2018 to 2021. If the second gas pipeline had been opened, it would've increased German gas dependency on Russia from 55 percent to 75 percent,” she said.  “The U.S. in 2020 sanctioned companies involved in building Nord Stream 2, and as Russia kept building up troops on the border of Ukraine in the winters of 2020, 2021 and 2022, the U.S. continued to pressure the new German government that came into office in the fall of 2021 under Chancellor Olaf Schultz,” she said. “Days before Russia attacked, Germany stopped the process of moving ahead with opening that second gas pipeline.”

She noted that the U.S. imposed sanctions on companies engaged in building Nord Stream 2 because of its concerns about the growing dependency of Germany on Russian gas and potential military use of German knowhow in Russia.

After the invasion, Chancellor Schultz told the Bundestag, the German parliament, that the invasion required an epic change in German policy and proposed five ways that policy would change:

1. “We stand behind Ukraine, we will help Ukraine.”
2. Impose sanctions on Russia to try to push Putin to back down from the war.
3. Prevent the war from spreading beyond Ukraine by defending “every inch of NATO territory.”
4. Build up the German armed forces, devoting 100 billion Euros and investing more than 2 percent of GDP required per year within NATO.
5. Guarantee a secure energy supply for Germany for the future.

Dr. Harrison also explored Germany's response to the Israel-Hamas war, and the historical context of Germany's commitment to Holocaust remembrance and the challenges posed by rising antisemitism in the aftermath of recent events.

"After World War II, West Germany signed an agreement with Israel in 1952 on reparations, the Luxembourg Agreement, where they paid 3 billion Deutsche marks over about 10 years to Israel," Dr. Harrison said. She outlined the historical reparations that have shaped Germany's relationship with Israel, underscoring the complexities of balancing support for Israel with concerns about Palestinian rights.

For more information on the lecture series, go to www.ncwa-fl.org and click on Lectures. Lectures are exclusively available to members. NCWA is accepting members at www.ncwa-fl.org/membership.

**About NCWA**

Over the last 40 years, NCWA has been providing the greater Naples area’s globally curious full-time and seasonal residents with a complete international affairs experience that is nonpartisan and policy focused. NCWA is a nonprofit that has 1,600+ members from Collier and Lee counties and is a member of the World Affairs Councils of America, which has 93 chapters in 40 states and more than 90,000 members. NCWA’s mission is to educate, inspire and engage our community in international affairs and critical global issues.

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