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## Impulse für die Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie



(Marcel Oosterwijk /Flickr)

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In **Resilienz stärken**

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# Authoritarian states are using weaponized



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Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has been a wake-up call to democratic governments everywhere. The world watches as an authoritarian and kleptocratic government – which is turning into an [outright dictatorship](#) – attempts to destroy and annex a peaceful, democratic country. The violence and horror unleashed in the wake of this war belonged to Europe's past, or so we believed. How has it come to this?

While democratic backsliding has been a major concern for the past decade, democracies, particularly the G7, have failed to tackle this issue adequately. The situation is alarming: according to [Freedom House](#), only two in ten people still live in a free country. In Russia, the elite have progressively subverted and assumed control of the country's institutions to serve their own economic interests. Western governments have been complacent to Russia's systemic corruption – largely because we have profited from cheap energy and access to the Russian market. In doing so, Europe has also turned a blind eye to the Russian government's breaches of international law and disregard for human rights and democratic principles, despite our [commitments](#) to safeguarding democracy.

» **Authoritarian regimes have found ways of turning corruption**



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turning corruption into a foreign policy tool to destabilize our societies and capture political and economic decision-makers for their own geopolitical objectives. This [form of weaponized corruption](#) is an essential component of the non-military arsenal of modern wars, also called hybrid warfare. Although, at first sight, the harm caused by hybrid warfare is not as obvious as by conventional wars, strategic corruption is pernicious and hampers the ability of a state to make sovereign decisions.

### Russia's Corruption Leverage

Germany has been one of the main targets of this form of corruption, as it is the economic powerhouse of Europe and exerts considerable influence within the European Union. In relation with its energy policy, Russia has appointed ex-German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder [to numerous well-paid positions](#) at Nord Stream AG – a consortium in which Gazprom holds a majority stake – and Rosneft. As a result, Schröder has used his influence to lobby for the construction of two controversial [pipelines](#), which led to disputes within the European Union and Germany over energy security. Sowing division among EU member states is one of Russia's key objectives.

Gerhard Schröder may be one of the most prominent cases of elite capture in Germany, but as a recent investigation from [Correctiv](#) shows, other high-profile politicians have also furthered Russia's energy

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Stream 2 pipeline. These lobby activities have resulted in Germany's overreliance and dangerous dependency on Russian gas and oil, which has been made abundantly clear through its [struggle to decouple](#) from Russian fossil fuels since February 24, 2022. These activities also undermine citizens' trust in democratic institutions and reinforce the impression that politicians are corruptible.

### Key Points:

- 1 Authoritarian states use weaponized corruption as a foreign policy tool to further their own geopolitical objectives – and Germany is a major target.
- 2 To tackle strategic corruption, Germany needs a holistic strategy to effectively close the loopholes that kleptocrats exploit.
- 3 Germany should use its upcoming National Security Strategy to announce a cross-ministerial initiative to counter corruption and promote integrity.

Another disturbing [example](#) of Russia's tactics includes the actions of Member of Parliament Markus Frohnmaier from Germany's far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party, who, according to multiple



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handful of decision-makers. Russia also provides financial and material support to far-right parties across Europe – such as the National Rally in France, the [Lega in Italy](#) and the [Fidesz in Hungary](#) – which then become vocal supporters of the Kremlin's politics. The leading example is the National Rally's [9.4 million euro loan](#) from a private Russian bank with ties to the Kremlin. This instance constitutes a direct financial interference by Russia in the political processes of another country via a private business surrogate. Had Marine Le Pen won the presidential elections in France this year, Moscow could have leveraged her party's debt to influence French politics.

After successfully employing strategic corruption to push Western countries, in particular Germany, to depend on Russian energy, Putin's kleptocratic regime grew confident that it could invade Ukraine with impunity. And the lukewarm reaction of Western governments after the annexation of Crimea comforted the regime in this delusion.

## A Holistic View to Countering Corruption

What lessons does this cautionary tale hold for Germany's national security strategy? It is imperative that Germany, like the United States, makes clear that countering corruption – and particularly strategic corruption – is a matter of national security. Indeed, while we have focused on Russia's use of strategic corruption, it is not the sole authoritarian country to integrate corruption as a core element of its foreign policy to further its interests, with numerous examples involving



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and cooling-off periods for Members of Parliament, ministers and their staff, as well as the [lack of transparency concerning campaign and political financing](#) . This is particularly true when it comes to sponsoring and so-called 'parallel actions' – i.e., supportive actions organized in favor of one party, but without its direct involvement.

**» Germany needs a holistic strategy to effectively counter corruption. «**

— Mickaël Roumegoux Rouvelle, Christoph Kowalewski



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Tackling corruption and promoting integrity must be the cornerstone of democratic governments' actions if they are to counter authoritarianism and strengthen democratic resilience successfully. Here, also, Germany needs a *Zeitenwende*.

corruption

authoritarianism

hybrid wars

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von Fennet Habte



30 Nov. 2022

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von Lydia Wachs



23 Nov. 2022

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