

The Unilateralist Temptation: Germany's Foreign Policy after the Cold War

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In the twelve years that elapsed between the fall of the Wall and the fall of the Twin Towers, analysts and commentators, politicians and public opinion in Germany and abroad speculated on whether a reunited Germany would pursue the same foreign policy as before. Most thought that the new Germany would be somewhat different from the old Federal Republic, more powerful, more central than West Germany; hence they expected that it would defend its interests from a stronger position. Some analysts and commentators even called for a radical change and for a powerful role in Europe and in the world. However, it was generally assumed that the foreign policy of the new Germany would not dramatically differ from the old one: certainly Germany would be more powerful and assertive, certainly change and continuity would go hand in hand, yet on the whole the latter would prevail. After all, unification had taken place under Western auspices. German institutions had not changed, neither had its commitments. It remained embedded in the Western community of states and its multilateral, intergovernmental and supranational institutions.

Indeed, for some time Germany's foreign policy did appear to follow its previous path. Thanks to Chancellor Kohl, Germany's unification was paralleled by its further integration in an ever closer Europe as the German government agreed to give up the DM and its monetary sovereignty against a majority of public opinion. Certainly, the Kohl government had some fits of unilateralism, pressing for instance for the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia in the winter of 1991–92 without having weighed the dramatic consequences of supporting the independence of new countries while not being able to defend them. It also called for the defence of narrow interests as opposed to broader, European interests and in 1997, at the Intergovernmental Conference in Amsterdam, it proposed a veto on the use of qualified majority voting on immigration issues which were to become Community matters, whereas it had formerly pleaded for an increased transfer of sovereignty to Brussels.

With the Red-Green coalition, which took over in 1998, a kind of involuntary division of labor was established between the Chancellor and his Foreign Minister. While Joschka Fischer placed the emphasis on continuity, defining German interests within the existing frameworks of multilateral institutions, the Chancellor of the Red-Green coalition resorted to a rhetoric different from that of his Foreign Minister or his predecessors. Thus Gerhard Schröder became the first Chancellor of the Second Republic to dare speak of Germany as a »große Macht« (great power), whereas all previous Chancellors had refrained from expressing such notions. This was echoed three years later by his appeal to follow a »German path« (»deutscher Weg«) – as he put it during the election campaign in 2002 when he fiercely opposed the American policy against Saddam Hussein – a path which contained strong unilateral elements and was consistent with the self-confidence that Gerhard Schröder had repeatedly advocated. Indeed, unilateral postures and policies have become more frequent in both European and transatlantic contexts, and the defence of narrow national interests has taken precedence over long-term European and global concerns.

However, to characterize Germany's foreign policy as a mixture of continuity and change is inadequate for two reasons. Firstly, we need to ask when change prevails over continuity, and vice versa. We may sense incremental changes, but we also need to see when continuity ceases to prevail over change. Secondly, the very multilateral frameworks in which the Federal Republic was ensconced have dramatically changed in nature in the post-Cold War era. Enlargement of both NATO and the EU, coupled with the policy of unilateralism of the United States, alter the very mechanics of multilateralism and this in turn will necessarily affect Germany's foreign policy – just as it will affect the foreign policy of others.

Multilateralism vs. Unilateralism

It has often been said that integration served Germany well, whether in multinational forums, such as NATO, or in the supranational venture of the European Community/Union. After the Second World War, the leaders of Germany, a country diminished both politically and economically, had little choice but to pursue a policy aimed first and foremost at restoring the credit and sovereignty of their country – despite the course which the Social Democratic Party under Kurt Schumacher's leadership

sought to steer. In the course of time, Germany succeeded in both these aims, or rather it gradually gathered respectability and increased its margin of manoeuvre, while remaining short of the ultimate sovereignty which came with reunification. In so doing, it also assured its security, both political and economic, by gaining access to American protection and to European markets. It also shaped its new identity based on cooperation and integration within intergovernmental and supranational organizations, as constructivist foreign policy research has shown.

Within these frameworks, Germany increased its power, not through the sheer fact of being a member of NATO and the European Community/Union, but rather because it set up the biggest and most efficient army on the European continent while becoming its most important economy and a major economic power world-wide. Yet it became a major military and economic contributor *because* it was integrated, *because* it fitted the European and world economy. It also became the United States's major ally on the continent *because* it was indispensable to the defence of the Western part of the continent. In turn, Germany's major military and economic roles were accepted by its neighbors and partners because it was embedded within multinational and supranational institutions. For these reasons, it may be said that integration served the country well.

Because multilateralism was an obligation, because it benefited German interests and also because Germany developed and perfected the tools and talents to promote it, it became what some have called »reflexive«.

Multilateralism also benefited Germany because, as time elapsed, German officials increasingly understood how to play with the constraints it necessarily implied. Thus as multilateral frameworks proliferated, with the development of a special relationship with France, with the inception of »Ostpolitik« and the creation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), they learned how to manipulate issues and frameworks and to multiply arenas of negotiation as well as to achieve a balance between various partners in order to alleviate the constraints of engagement and embeddedness. Keeping the balance was certainly a delicate game as Germany remained firmly anchored in the Western and transatlantic community of states. It did not imply a balance of power as this had operated in the 19th century, where powers were free to change

coalitions. It implied a delicate game of being partners with all while remaining firmly anchored in the West. Within these limits, German politicians and diplomats became to a certain extent intermediaries, a kind of bridge, between East and West, between France and the United States, and between small and bigger states while trying to avoid having to choose one or the other. Instead of having to agonize over choice and to antagonize one partner, they preferred the policy of »sowohl als auch« (both x and y), as Timothy Garton Ash astutely put it.¹

Last but not least, the benefits of multilateralism fed a *belief* – which became increasingly more deeply and widely held – that multilateralism worked well for Germany. At the same time German politicians and diplomats perfected their *savoir-faire*, their ability to deal with multilateralism. At least two names stand out: Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Joschka Fischer both displayed an enormous talent at intermediation. Fischer is, for instance, the first German diplomat ever to enjoy an enormous prestige in the Middle East. Certainly, Germany enjoys what I call elsewhere *political credit*, that is, the trust that a particular political agent prompts among his partners, in this case the trust that Germany, i.e. German governmental and non-governmental actors prompt among their foreign partners.² This trust is based on material investments as well as on immaterial ones. Immaterial investments include personality (convictions, diplomatic talents, etc.) as well as the belief of Germany's partners that it is able to deliver. This belief in turn is nurtured by Germany's performance, based on sustained networks of relations, on permanent contacts, on help and aid, etc., in other words on a political capital which is continuously and patiently fostered by governmental and non-governmental actors alike, and political foundations in particular, which are so peculiar to the German political system. It is not an immediate return of investment, but is based rather on long-term investments, rooted in the development and maintenance of networks. At the same time, while immaterial investments do play a crucial role, as underlined here, so do material ones. In this respect, it has often been pointed out that German governments have

1. Timothy Garton Ash: *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, London: Vintage, 1993.

2. Anne-Marie Le Gloannec (ed.): *Non-State Actors in Transnational Relations: The Case of Germany*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming. The book analyzes among other things the role of political foundations and non-governmental actors.

not shied from making side-payments to sustain relations with partners, in Europe in particular.

Because multilateralism was an obligation, because it benefited German interests and also because Germany developed and perfected the tools and talents to promote it, it became what some have called »reflexive«.³ After unification, multilateralism remained the code word of German diplomacy under both Chancellors. Chancellor Kohl forcefully promoted European integration and Economic and Monetary Union as well as the integration of the new democracies into the European area of peace and prosperity, while his Defence Minister, Volker Rühle, became the first politician in the Atlantic Alliance to call for NATO's enlargement. In other words, the Kohl government sought to extend those multilateral institutions which had worked so well to the benefit of Germany and its partners in the post-war era. Later, Chancellor Schröder and his Foreign Minister brilliantly managed the war against Serbia and its resolution. Previously, Volker Rühle had gradually involved the Bundeswehr in »out-of-area« operations, from Cambodia and Somalia to the former Yugoslavia, without however allowing it to take part in combat. In the next phase, it was the Red-Green Coalition which authorized the Bundeswehr to take part in military strikes against Serbia and in military operations in Afghanistan. Both steps were paralleled by diplomatic actions, in particular by the negotiation of a cease-fire with Russia and the Finnish and Serbian Presidents, by the preparation of a Stability Pact for the Balkans in 1999, and later by the Afghanistan Peace Conference on the Petersberg, symbolizing, as Hanns Maull put it, the Civilian Power approach of multilateral inclusion, socio-economic development, democratization, co-operation and the prospect of membership of the European Union.⁴

However, as briefly mentioned in the introduction, multilateralism has also come under fire and unilateral actions have been numerous under the leadership of both Chancellors. This has mainly been the case where

3. See e.g. Jeffrey J. Anderson: »Hard Interests, Soft Power and Germany's Changing Role in Europe« in: Peter Katzenstein (ed.): *Tamed Power, Germany in Europe*, Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 80–106, and Jeffrey J. Anderson: *German Unification and the Union of Europe. The Domestic Politics of Integration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

4. Hanns W. Maull: »Germany's Foreign Policy, post-Kosovo: Still a »Civilian Power«?« in: Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns W. Maull (eds.): *Germany as a Civilian Power? The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 110.

redistributive policy in the European Union is concerned, as Hanns Maull has pointed out.⁵ This affects, for example, the particular status of the »Landesbanken« which provide subsidized finances to local business, also that of radio and television stations, the defence of professional interests such as those of the German car makers against European recycling policies, the support of state aid such as the subsidies that Saxony granted a Volkswagen plant, the quarrel over Germany's contribution to the EU budget ...: all these are episodes which have bitterly pitted the German government, the Länder, German business and banking sectors as well as the bulk of public opinion against the European Commission. But other, non-redistributive issues have also been tackled unilaterally. These include the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia in 1992, which Hans-Dietrich Genscher forcefully advocated in spite of misgivings on the part of his partners who looked for safeguards by enumerating criteria for recognition; the veto that Chancellor Kohl himself opposed in Amsterdam in 1997 to the use of qualified majority voting for the provisions on immigration which had been transferred from the »third pillar« to the »first pillar«; and, last but not least, the staunch refusal to take part in the US-led war against Iraq whatever resolutions the United Nations Security Council might pass. In all three instances, Germany's partners were shocked, wondering whether unilateralism would be the new policy of the German government despite its previous attachment to European integration and multilateral frameworks, to negotiations over »coups de force« and to legality over power politics. Some even wondered whether German policy in Europe had become »more British«.

Changing Paradigms, Free-floating Coalitions and the Predominance of Tactics

Germany's Hegemony of Weakness

When trying to understand the sources of these repeated examples of unilateralism, it is easy to point to the dwindling resources of German states and society in the wake of unification. To sustain their earlier »reflexive multilateralism«, German decision-makers and diplomats could draw on both material and immaterial resources as mentioned above. In post-1990

5. Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns W. Maull: »Learned its Lesson Well: Germany as a Civilian Power Ten Years After Unification« in: Harnisch and Maull, op. cit., p. 146.

Germany, these are increasingly failing. When compared to Germany's standing and role in the European Community in the '60s, '70s and even in the '80s, its position has now considerably weakened. The Federal Republic of Germany experienced then what came to be known as a »virtuous circle«: its industry specialized in the production of high-quality equipment and chemical products that remained in almost limitless international demand, regardless of price. Far from hindering exports, the strong currency and higher prices led to increased growth, higher wages and, ultimately, internal stability; external growth and internal stability thus complemented each other. Since then, the virtuous circle has been turned into a vicious circle, in which fierce international competition, lagging internal consumption, the ongoing priority given to the fight against inflation, and increasing social expenditure, linked to the burden of unemployment in particular, limit public resources and private spending and have turned the German economy into the sick man of the EU. Instead of becoming the semi-superpower that most observers expected after unification, Germany has come to exercise a kind of »hegemony of weakness«. ⁶ In effect, both its structural power and its intentional power have changed (to use the categories employed by S. Guzzini ⁷ and others). In terms of structural power, the German economy has become a liability for the EU, along with, one should add, those of such countries as France and Italy. It is not the European engine it used to be. On the contrary, since Germany is the main customer of most European countries, its dire state has imposed burdens on its partners.

As far as intentional power is concerned, the German government has lost the means and willingness to promote European interests over narrower, national or sectoral interests. With the new Länder absorbing subsidies and social contributions, with globalization confronting industry, trade and services in the old Länder with fierce competition, a squeezed labor market and overburdened public finances, the government is seeking to limit expenditure. Side-payments are not an option any more. Indeed, cuts in the contributions to the EC budget are most welcome: this

6. Anne-Marie Le Gloannec: *L'Allemagne après la guerre froide. Le vainqueur entravé*, Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1993.

7. »Structural Power: The Limits of Neo-Realist Analysis« in: *International Organization*, 47 (Summer 1993), pp. 443–478. See also, among others, Simon Bulmer: »Shaping the Rules? The Constitutive Politics of the European Union and German Power« in: P. Katzenstein, op. cit., pp. 49–79.

was Gerhard Schröder's message while campaigning for the 1998 national elections and this was his explicit aim when he held the EU Presidency in 1999. This demand is now somewhat less vocal, though it continues to preside over most EC/EU negotiations. Not only have dwindling resources eroded the European options of the German government, they have also seriously endangered its national ambitions. When the Red-Green coalition came to power in 1998, the new Chancellor claimed that Germany had become a normal nation, and later that his country was a big power (»eine große Macht«)⁸ and that it had to emancipate itself, to follow a »German path« (»deutscher Weg«). Yet this rhetoric of power and so-called emancipation has hardly been followed by deeds. Certainly there were no grounds for thinking that German decision-makers ever intended to break away from multinational frameworks, let alone revert to a nationalist path – or past. The 1999 diplomatic feats, involving the negotiation of a cease-fire in Kosovo and Serbia and the negotiation of a package deal, the Stability Pact for the Balkans, offering the former Yugoslavia a peaceful and prosperous future, took place within the multilateral frameworks of the European Union, the G8 – with Germany the incumbent president of both organizations – and the United Nations. The German government did not, however, make much effort to support implementation of the Stability Pact once the process had been launched. As Hanns Maull put it: »The impression is that Berlin considered the problem solved once it had created an institutional framework for its solution.«⁹ Even the more ominous-sounding reconstitution of Germany's power in Europe did not materialize as its means failed. Germany's presence in the world, from an overstretched Bundeswehr to the output of the Deutsche Welle (Germany's international broadcaster), is held back by the country's financial straits.

Having regained some powers with the reform of the Constitution, the Länder also are putting a brake on further integration within the EU, as demonstrated in Amsterdam in 1997. One might even add that, generally speaking, they are putting a brake on Germany's capacity to act. Since unification, the number of Länder has increased and so has their heterogeneity, as well as the patterns of possible coalitions, now including

8. Gerhard Schröder, »Eine Außenpolitik des ›Dritten Weges‹« in: *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, 50/7-8 (1999), pp. 392–6.

9. Hanns W. Maull: »Germany's Foreign Policy, post-Kosovo: Still a ›Civilian Power‹?« in: Harnisch and Maull, op. cit., p. 123.

the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). As a result, the Bundesrat and the coordination mechanism between the Länder have become quite cumbersome and difficult to deal with as compared with the '60s and '70s when simpler coalition patterns prevailed – and this at a time when the Bundesrat is playing an exceedingly important role both at federal and European levels. For this very reason, decision-making processes have become extremely intricate, increasing the risks of incrementalism, joint decision traps and absence of reform. In other words, the unification of Germany has brought about a territorialization of politics, consistent with unification but little conducive to Europeanization and globalization. Parallel to this territorialization of politics, though unrelated to it, the political horizon has somewhat shrunk. Political elites in Germany are surprisingly provincial: if one looks for instance at the background and concerns of national representatives, those interested in European affairs, let alone in foreign policy, are vastly underrepresented.

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Public opinion has grown increasingly hostile to what is being seen as a pervasive intrusion of the European Community in German affairs, a hostility both nurtured by diminished resources and fostered by the Chancellor's anti-European rhetoric. This is the end of the permissive consensus that so many observers formerly hailed: this constrains governmental policy but is also fostered by it. Certainly, opinion polls look somewhat contradictory: a recent study by the German Marshall Fund and the Compagnia de Sao Paolo reveals a growing Europeanization of German public opinion, a development which is the reverse image of the growing chasm between Europeans and Americans. However, if all the opinion polls were put together, one might suspect that although a kind of European identity is strengthening in Germany, German public opinion opposes further transfer of sovereignty to the European Community (as well as maybe some transfer already completed).

Changing Patterns of Multilateralism

To that extent, public opinion is in tune with both the Federal government's instincts and the general mood in the European Union: what pre-

vails here is a kind of reflexive defence of national interests over the interests of the whole, a marked preference for intergovernmental solutions rather than for supranational schemes, a predominance of short-term issues and considerations over strategic visions. This is a question of mood, of »Zeitgeist«, but this in turn is linked to deep-set changes in the structures of the international and European systems and in the issues that are dealt with in these frameworks. As a result, while the main question raised in the 1990s about the future orientation of Germany's foreign policy was whether the Federal government would go on working within multilateral frameworks – and while the answer most observers reached was mainly yes – we may now wonder to what extent the workings of these multilateral frameworks and their very nature have changed, and hence to what extent Germany's foreign policy and that of other countries in Europe will change.

The changes in structure are fostering a »Zeitgeist« which is pointing firmly at short-term gains and loose commitments, at the defence of national interests over long-term European interests. To that extent, Germany is going with the flow instead of being the odd man out that some feared after unification.

Changes in multinational structures are most obvious in the European Union and probably have the most far-reaching consequences due to the constraints that Europe is imposing on the policies of member-states. In the latest rounds of enlargement of the European Community/European Union, the rules of the game have been altered. With a higher number of members, the combinations of possible coalitions have increased – though their precise parameters have been redefined by the Treaty of Nice, and may be revamped again if the Constitution worked out by the Convention is adopted. Combined with the multiplication of negotiations – from one Intergovernmental Conference to another – and the multiplication of issues – from positive integration to enlargement – this explosion in the number of possible coalitions is leading to a general pattern of what one might call free-floating coalitions. These are made and unmade issue by issue, leading to the development of what various actors and observers have dubbed *multi-bilateralism*. These developments bring a number of consequences. First of all, with the increased pace of negotiations, from positive integration to enlargement, the defence of na-

tional interests may seem more necessary to some members and the urge to make conditional deals and blackmail partners becomes quite irresistible. Secondly, old complicities and forms of co-operation are more difficult to sustain because they seem less rewarding than short-term coalitions. On the whole, the changes in structure are fostering a »Zeitgeist« which is pointing firmly at short-term gains and loose commitments, at the defence of national interests over long-term European interests. To that extent, Germany is going with the flow instead of being the odd man out that some feared after unification.

The Weakening of Franco-German Leadership

Franco-German co-operation is an example of these changes. It had formerly served as a core factor in Europe, promoting European integration first and foremost in the monetary area, from the »currency snake« and the monetary arrangements of the 1970s to European Monetary Union in the 1990s. The new European structure which emerged in the wake of the 1995 enlargement, combined with a lack of a common strategy or a common vision on the part of the German Chancellor and the French President, led to a disinvestment in Franco-German affairs. Chancellor Kohl resorted to a unilateralist strategy towards the end of the Amsterdam summit in 1997 as it became clear that Paris and Bonn did not share the same approach. While the German government stuck to a supranational approach during the pre-negotiations and negotiations, the French were true to their intergovernmental preferences: without a strong partner, the German government chose unilateralism over multilateralism. During the following years, the Franco-German relationship was put on hold. Of course, co-operation continued between ministries: both the Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision and the Planungsstab of the two Foreign Ministries produced common papers. However, disinterest, disagreement and even spats – at the Berlin and Nice summits in 1999 and 2000 – characterized the relations between the upper echelons. In tune with the new multi-bilateralism, the German government, and the Chancellery in particular, sought new partnerships in London and Madrid.

The renewed fervor of Franco-German affairs since January 2003 is the product of isolation. Since its unilateral rejection of American policy over Iraq, which estranged it from Washington and prevented any common position in the EU, the Federal government had lost much influence in

both transatlantic and European spheres. Later in the year, the French government also ran the risk of being isolated because of its strong criticism of US policy and hegemony. Both alienated the more Atlanticist of their European partners. Since then, a number of projects have been put forth by the two governments, relating either to Franco-German affairs – such as the strengthening of ties between Länder and regions – or the wider EC/EU context – offering for instance to create an autonomous military planning unit and to launch an economic initiative to foster growth.

Nonetheless it is far from certain that the present warming of Franco-German relations will go beyond the mere desire to overcome isolation and withstand the preference for looser, free-floating coalitions that the current EU structures foster. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the Franco-German relationship as it stands today seems unbalanced in the eyes of a number of Germans: this has often been the case in the past, and it is even more so at a time when a number of issues are being discussed within the United Nations Security Council where the French retain a permanent seat. At the same time, it seems that the Germans have lost their reflexive inclination for Franco-German consultation and co-operation, whereas this is still important to the French. Secondly, the Franco-German claim to exercise leadership in the EC/EU has lost legitimacy. Formerly it had a certain amount, even if this was grudgingly accepted by the smaller states. It had a historical legitimacy in that the French and the Germans had worked towards reconciliation and led the way towards European integration. It also had a legitimacy derived from efficiency as the two invented monetary rapprochement and union. In the new era, the Franco-German relationship has lost both: historical legitimacy does not resound as such in the new democracies which underwent a different history. Certainly the Poles, for instance, would like to promote a Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation on the Franco-German pattern. It does not mean, however, that a Franco-German leadership may derive its rationale from times past. As to efficiency, this is called into question by the weakness of both countries' economies and their breaking of the rules of the Stability Pact. On the whole, it is only with difficulty that the European Union might agree to accommodate such a tandem, based on the defence of their own interests. To be accepted in the future, it should first and foremost prove that it can negotiate in the interests of all members – and it probably should involve some other partners, for example the British as far as defence matters are concerned, as practised since the Berlin summit in October 2003, and maybe some other partners for other issues.

Interlocutor, Rather than Bridge: Perspectives for Germany's International Role

Certainly those in Germany who resent an imbalance between their country and France have reasons to do so but they also have a lot to blame their government for. While Berlin denounced the American policy vis-à-vis Iraq, and did so unilaterally, going as far as to declare that it would not take heed of the UN Security Council resolutions, thus estranging itself from Washington and also from those who wanted to stick to multilateralism, it further ruined a political capital which it had patiently hoarded in a number of European countries, in Poland, Spain and the Czech Republic. To that extent, it has jeopardized its function as a bridge between the US and France, for instance, between East and West, and between smaller and bigger states in Europe. Of course, one may wonder whether this position can still be held at all, and for a number of reasons. With their unilateralist policy, the United States has estranged itself from Europe much more than Europeans have done: in abandoning a number of multilateral commitments – from the Kyoto Protocol to the International Criminal Court – and in favoring coalitions of the willing over resorting to NATO, it has signalled a certain indifference and even contempt for the Europeans as a whole. To that extent, the position of an intermediary between Europe and the United States is hardly tenable, as British policy has shown. While Europe as a whole might possibly influence the United States, a single country can do little. As far as the position of an intermediary between East and West, or between small and bigger states is concerned, the Federal Republic may no longer be in a position to perform this role. While it could speak for the East in the early days, when enlargement was still looming on the horizon, it certainly cannot do so in a Europe of 25 member states. However, it may still regain the position of a privileged interlocutor for a number of states, both big and small, if it can prove that it is a key country on the continent, able to shape European destinies.