

Article

Germany's Leadership in Europe: Finding Its New Role

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Abstract

Against the background of the socio-economic difficulties in parts of the Eurozone, migratory pressures and a crisis of the project of European integration at home and a new geo-political environment in its neighborhood in the East and South, German foreign policy finds itself confronted with new expectations and demands from its partners. At the same time, Germany also faces, for the first time, a significant challenge to its traditional pro-European policies at home from the AfD, a new, right-wing populist party. This article draws on role theory to analyze how German foreign policy is adjusting to this new situation, focusing on both the *ego* and the *alter* parts of Germany's foreign policy role concept.

Keywords

German Foreign Policy, Role Theory, Civilian Power, Leadership, European Union

Introduction

Since the onset of the crisis in international financial markets in 2007, the European Union has been in the throes of a deep, perhaps existential crisis. Germany, while initially heavily affected by the fall-out of the turmoil in world markets, managed to overcome the resulting economic contraction rather quickly, drawing on some of the traditional strengths of its socio-economic and political model. As a result, Berlin found itself increasingly pushed into a key position within both the Eurozone crisis triggered by Greece's deteriorating public finances and the travails of the European Union under the onslaught of refugees from the South and South East. Reluctantly at first, but then with increasing confidence Berlin assumed the mantle of European leadership.

Yet to many observers (Kundnani 2011; Szabo 2015; Hellmann 2016; Roos 2017), this new Germany seemed to have moved away from its traditional, multi-lateralist foreign policy orientation as a "civilian power" (Maull 2007; Maull 2014; Szabo 2004: 74f). Does Berlin still pursue the civilizing of international relations,

within Europe and beyond, as this ideal-type role concept (Kirste/Maull 1996) suggests? Or was it shifting to another, less benign role concept that threatened to re-open the perennial “German question” (Kundnani 2014)?¹ This article tries to answer these questions by looking first at Germany’s European policies during the last decade, then at the expectations of others in Germany, and finally at the changing context, both at home and abroad, and within Europe and beyond, to which German European policies had to adapt.

Germany as a Civilian Power: Background

The notion of Germany (and Japan) as “civilian powers” originated from the observation that both West Germany and Japan – who by the late 1980s were again among the leading economic and military powers² – pursued foreign policies that diverged significantly from the traditional patterns of great power politics: both countries essentially had transferred responsibility for their national security to the United States (Maull 1990/91; Maull 2014). The explanation for this unusual foreign policy behavior seemed to lie with the specific identities and role concepts those two countries had adopted over the course of the second half of the last century.

Role Theory

The theoretical perspective this essay employs is role theory (Holsti 1970; Kirste/Maull 1996; Aggestam 2004; Harnisch/Frank/Maull 2011). Role theory postulates that states, like individuals, are embedded in a social context in which they behave on the basis of norms they have acquired (through processes of socialization) and developed themselves (on the basis of beliefs about their own identity, past experiences and external circumstances). Role concepts reflect the expectation states have about their own behavior (*ego* dimension), but also the expectations of others (*alter* dimension).

Since national role concepts involve complex descriptions of identity (e.g., Germany as a Western European democracy, and a member state of the UN, the EU, NATO and the OSCE, to name just a few attributes) and desirable behavior (e.g., close cooperation with and integration into both the EU and NATO, remaining internationally competitive as an economy, and promoting human rights and

¹ The German question referred to the historical observation that Germany was too strong to be dominated by the rest of Europe but too weak to dominate the continent herself, producing recurrent struggles to establish control over Germany by other European powers or German hegemony in Europe.

² In 1989, West Germany’s military expenditure, at USD 58.1 bill., was the fifth-largest defense budget worldwide, practically on par with that of the UK (59.9 bill.) and France (58.4 bill.; figures are in constant USD at 2015 prices. Data taken from SIPRI Database: Military expenditure by country, available at: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Milex-constant-2015-USD.pdf> [March 24, 2018]). With a total strength of close to 500,000 soldiers, the Bundeswehr was the largest conventional NATO force in Europe.

democracy worldwide), they tend to be marked by inherent tensions and even contradictions between different norms. Role concepts therefore can provide no more than broad foreign policy guidelines, and they are in constant need of re-affirmation and/or modification to reflect changing circumstances (Mauil 2014). In fact, they therefore represent no more than the dominant interpretations of national role concepts by political elites that resonate with their publics at any given moment of time, yet they usually are quite “sticky”, often displaying surprising continuity.

Germany's Role Concept, 1949 to 2009

Continuity certainly has been the hallmark of (West) Germany's foreign policy role concept. This developed out of the constraints of a Germany and a Europe that was divided by the Cold War. The Cold War obliged West Germany to join NATO, and it brought massive opportunities for reconstruction and economic revival with the Marshall plan, which West Germany used as its vehicle to economic rehabilitation and integration. The choices made to integrate West Germany into the Western alliance system reflected external demands and exigencies as well as the preferences of the West German political leadership from 1949 onward. Those choices, in turn, conveyed important elements of a new political identity to West Germany, and therefore created a virtuous circle in which political culture, domestic politics and foreign policy worked to enforce each other mutually in a positive way (Hanrieder 1989; Haftendorn 2006).

The West German role concept, as it developed through the 1950s and 1960s to reach maturity in the early 1970s, closely resembled that of an ideal-type “civilian power”. This particular role concept strives to “civilize” international politics, i.e. to transform them in ways that resemble the logic of domestic politics within a liberal democratic polity (Kirste/Mauil 1996; Mauil 2007, 2014). Its three most important elements are a) the will to shape future world politics (*Gestaltungswillen*), b) renunciation of autonomy (*Autonomieverzicht*) and c) policies that promote international norms even without specific national interests involved (*interessenunabhängige Normendurchsetzung*) (Fraenkler et al 1997).

(West) Germany's particular civilian power role concept closely resembled this ideal-type. Among the three most important aspects of Germany's role concept have been its dedication to **multilateralism** in general and to **European integration** in particular as means to transform interstate relations, within (Western) Europe and beyond. Traditionally, European integration was conceived as a supranational project that required a new concept of sovereignty (“shared sovereignty”) that stood in stark contrast to the Westphalian concept of sovereignty that considered sovereignty as indivisible (Mattli 2000). West Germany found it easy to adopt such a “post-modern” concept of sovereignty for two major rea-

sons. First, it had to rely on external security guarantees provided, in the last analysis, by U.S. nuclear weapons, rather than on its own military strength, which was bound to alarm its neighbors. To reassure them, West Germany refrained from developing or acquiring any weapons of mass destruction and even from any unilateral national capacity of military power projection: the *Bundeswehr* was fully integrated into NATO's chain of command and therefore unable to conduct autonomous military operations. Second, West Germany, in Peter Katzenstein's felicitous phrase, was a "semi-sovereign country" also with regard to its domestic politics: the Länder shared in the exercise of power at the centre of the West German state.

Another important principle that West Germany pursued in its foreign policies was **rehabilitation**. The atrocities of Nazi Germany (military conquest and subjugation of much of Europe, the holocaust) had ended in 1945 not only with military and political defeat, but also with a moral catastrophe for the Germans. To re-establish respectability, West Germany therefore insisted on developing a democratic polity in which the rule of law and the respect for human rights would be central concerns. It also accepted the need for atonement, notably in its relationship with Israel, the Jewish state. Consequences flowing from this desire to gain rehabilitation and respectability were the acceptance of international law as superior to regular West German laws in the *Grundgesetz*, the West German constitution, the expectation that German foreign policy would be "principled" (*wertorientiert*) and uphold the international rule of law.

Finally, with regard to pan-European security, West Germany from the 1970s onward strove for **peace and stability** no longer primarily through deterrence, but through diplomacy, as well. This was the logic of *Ostpolitik*, which was initiated in 1969 and largely completed by 1972. The Soviet Union (now the Russian Federation) had to be accepted as part of and thus integrated into the pan-European order security order – a notion first systematically pursued in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) that was convened for the first time in July 1973, passed the Helsinki documents in 1975 and on January 1st, 1995 became the "Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe" (OSCE). The basic assumption behind this policy was that war in Europe had to be prevented at all cost: military power simply did not hold any good options for Germany once deterrence had failed.³

Finally, West Germany's role concept also included the norm of **reconstruction and prosperity**. To overcome the destructions of World War II and integrate some twelve million Germans from the Eastern parts of pre-war Germany into

³ The most succinct way to summarize these three core principles of Germany's foreign policy role concept are: "never alone", "never again" and "politics before force". See Maull, in: Colvin (ed) 2014, p. 404

West Germany, West Germany needed open markets provided within Europe, across the Atlantic and beyond. Benefitting from an undervalued currency in the system of fixed exchange rates established as part of the liberal international order of Bretton Woods, West Germany from 1950 to 1973 experienced a remarkable economic boom on the basis of the strong performance of some of its export industries (such as chemicals, steel, engineering, machine tools, and motor cars) (Abelshauser 2011).

Germany's Role Concept Revised

One of the great puzzles of German foreign policy have been the remarkable continuities between the foreign policies of West Germany until unification, and of united Germany since then. Why would the basic orientations of Germany in international relations essentially remain largely unchanged while both Germany itself and the world around it had been transformed profoundly? The explanation of this paradox needs to recognize, first, that West Germany's foreign policies had been hugely successful, with its ultimate achievement the peaceful reunification of the two Germanies within the framework of the 2+4 Treaty, i.e., with the blessing of the victorious powers over Nazi Germany, as well as the international community at large (Zelikov/Rice 1997). The very success of West Germany's foreign policy orientation naturally predisposed the German foreign policy establishment to extrapolate it into the future (a phenomenon that largely characterized the internal aspects of unification, as well, resulting in what has been described as "unification by absorption"). Secondly, however, this role concept was also deemed to be, and indeed probably was, well suited to the new European and international context in which German foreign policy now had to be conducted (Kohl 2007, 2014; Genscher 1995: 709ff, Heumann 2012: 284ff)

Still, the foreign policy role concept of the newly united Germany could hardly be expected to survive unification completely unchanged, and change there was, despite the essential continuity in foreign policy orientations. The most important of those modifications concerned the use of military force. As we have seen, as part of its strategy to build trust and gain acceptance with its Western allies, West Germany had accepted important constraints on its military power, most notably in renouncing the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (Haftendorn 2006: 97f). The 2+4 Treaty reconfirmed some of those self-imposed constraints and imposed new upper limits on the personnel strength of the *Bundeswehr* (*Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung in Bezug auf Deutschland*, 12. September 1990, available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zwei-Plus-Vier-Vertrag.pdf?uselang=de> [Sept. 10, 2017]).

During the 1990s, Germany's attitude towards the use of force changed, driven by the wars of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia that took place in the

immediate neighborhood of Germany (Philippi 1996). While during the Gulf war in 1991 to liberate Kuwait, newly united Germany had come under strong criticism for its military abstention and its “cheque-book diplomacy”, the foreign policy establishment subsequently came to accept the need for Germany to participate, under certain circumstances, in multilateral military operations to keep or even to enforce peace, and it eventually also was able to build public support for *Bundeswehr* participation in military operations beyond individual and collective self-defense (Meiers 2006). All such operations had to be authorized by parliament, however, and they were to be confined to multilateral interventions that enjoyed international legitimacy.⁴

Other changes were less apparent at first. Thus, there was a reversal in the relative importance of Germany’s political partners and institutional memberships. While it was axiomatic that West German foreign policy would do anything to avoid having to choose between its two principal allies, the United States and France, and between NATO and the European Community during the Cold War, the security relationship with the United States and NATO ultimately were paramount. After 1990, while Germany continued to emphasize the importance of both partners and both organizations, France and the European Union came to be more important than the security alliance with the U.S. A first sign of this subtle shift came when Chancellor Helmut Kohl politely ignored the invitation of U.S. President George H.W. Bush in 1989 (Bush 1989) to become America’s “partner in leadership”. Germany also changed its attitude towards European integration from a federalist position that emphasized the supranational aspects of the European project towards an intergovernmental approach that relied less on European institutions and more on cooperation between member governments.

In 2003, Germany parted ways diplomatically with U.S. policies towards Iraq when it voted - with France, Russia and China - against the authorization of Washington’s policy of counter-proliferation by military intervention and regime change in the United Nations Security Council, in which Germany at the time was a non-permanent member (Szabo 2004; Joetze 2010). The ultimate reason for the split was that Washington expected Berlin to support a policy, based on flimsy evidence and unpersuasive arguments, that fundamentally contradicted Germany’s foreign policy role concept as a “civilian power” (Rudolf 2005). This was the first time since unification that Germany failed to meet the expectations and demands of one of its most significant “alter” actors, the United States. More

⁴ The decisive step in this process was a ruling of Germany’s Constitutional Court on the participation of the *Bundeswehr* in a range of enforcement missions in the former Yugoslavia, as well as in other parts of the world (participation in UN missions in Cambodia and Somalia). The Court found such operations to be constitutional if they were undertaken within the context of “systems of collective security” (the Court somewhat oddly deemed both NATO and the EU, not only the United Nations, to meet this requirement) but stipulated the need for explicit parliamentary authorization in each case (Philippi 1996: pp. 48ff).

remarkably still, the German government in 2002/3 opposed Washington initially on its own; France's position to side with Germany on this issue was taken only in February 2003, shortly before the vote in the UN Security Council (Szabo 2004: 42ff; Joetze 2010: 130f)

Overall, there was a shift towards a more robust and open pursuit of German interests within the European Union: German policies towards the EU, while still favoring further integration in principle, became "weaker, meaner and leaner" (Harnisch and Schieder 2006; Schieder 2014). Examples for this were European policies on immigration or European security and defense. This new, more robust approach to European integration was nicely summarized by the then Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maiziere, in his much-quoted statement: "For our European friends, they need to come to terms with the fact that Germany is going to act just as other European countries do in Brussels", confirming that Germany was now "...defending its national interest with a lot of vigour" (Chaffin 2010).

Expectations in German Leadership

In retrospect, one can see clearly how the reunification of Germany and Europe from 1990 onward changed the relative balance of power within Europe in favor of Germany. During the 1990s, Europe was preoccupied internally with issues of enlargement and deepening, and externally with the wars of disintegration in former Yugoslavia. In this phase, Germany tried to assume a leadership role both with regard to managing the conflicts on the Balkans and (more successfully) in promoting enlargement through assembling political coalitions within NATO and the EU. This eventually led to the "widening" of NATO and EU membership and substantial modifications ("deepening") in the way the two organizations worked (Paterson 2005). In the context of Yugoslavia, however, German leadership was less successful; eventually, it was the alignment of U.S. and French policies that allowed NATO intervene to pacify first Bosnia (1995) and then also Kosovo (1999) (Mauil 2000).

Within the European context, the peak of German "leadership from behind", a rather traditional, well-tried form of exercising influence through tenacious and shrewd coalition-building, during this period came with the German EU presidency in the first half of 2007. During that presidency, Berlin was able to help the European Union overcome the deep crisis into which it had fallen as a result of the rejection of the EU Constitutional Treaty by referenda in the Netherlands and France in 2005. The aborted Constitutional Treaty was replaced by the Treaty of Lisbon, which saved much of the substance of the proposed Constitutional Treaty and enabled the EU to regain its footing. During that period, Germany largely met the expectations from its European partners by exercising a leading role through discreetly but effectively organizing diplomatic solutions and finan-

cially underwriting them (Kietz/Perthes 2007). We therefore find a rather close fit between Germany's own European policy role concept (the "ego part") and that of its European and transatlantic partners (the "alter part").

Within NATO, Germany moved from the abstentionism during the Gulf War of 1991/1992 to participation in peace enforcement missions in the former Yugoslavia (1995 in Bosnia, 1999 over Kosovo) and the deployment of Special Forces in Afghanistan as part of the "unqualified solidarity" expressed by the German government with the United States after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. During the Iraq crisis in 2002/2003, German relations with the U.S. as the power that dominated NATO deteriorated dramatically, when Germany not only refused to consider joining the U.S.-assembled "coalition of the willing" to invade Iraq, but also – together with Russia, China and eventually also France - opposed Washington in the UN Security Council.

The Financial Crisis

The world financial crisis ushered in a new phase of German leadership in Europe. It began with the implosion of the frothy American housing market and reached its apogee in September 2008 with the failure of Lehman Brothers, one of the largest U.S. investment banks. This leadership overall was ushered in a new phase of German leadership in Europe. This leadership overall was more forceful, more open and less flexible than what West Germany had practiced before unification and united Germany since. Its foundations lay in Germany's rapid economic recovery from the fall-out of the crisis in 2009 from 2010 onward. This successful recovery has frequently been ascribed to economic and social policy reforms undertaken by the Red-Green coalition government, the so-called Hartz IV reforms that became effective in 2005. Beyond that, it was seen – both within Germany and outside – as vindicating the specific socio-economic and political model that West Germany had evolved (Paterson 2011; Dehousse/Fabry 2010; Bouin 2017: 24ff). Central to this model were an emphasis on the international competitiveness of Germany's traditional export industries, cooperative industrial relations that allowed business and trade unions to negotiate moderate wage demands in line with increases in productivity, as well as sound public finances, low inflation and a vibrant sector of small and medium-sized enterprises (Brunnenmeier/James/Landau 2017: 56-82).

It was the success of Germany in adapting to the consequences of the world financial and economic crisis in 2009/2010 that led many observers to include Germany in the category of "rising powers", such as Chinas, India and Brazil.⁵

⁵ Thus, in 2013 Germany was for the first time chosen as the most favourably viewed country in the world by a BBC poll that surveyed more than 26,000 people worldwide (BBC poll: Germany most popular country in the world, May 23, 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22624104> [March 25, 2018]), and by 2017, Chancellor Merkel was designated the "most

The divergence of economic performance in terms of international competitiveness and public finances within the eurozone, which had been going on since the beginning of the introduction of the euro, was dramatically accentuated by the fallout from the crisis when a new Greek government in 2009 announced that Greece's public debt was in fact much higher than previous governments were willing to admit (Sandbu 2015: 51). The resulting upheaval in bond markets soon turned contagious, affecting Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy. This put Germany's leadership in the eurozone on the spot, forcing it to choose between financial solidarity with the Southern eurozone countries and its own public financial objectives. Its policy responses tried to square that circle: they gave precedence to Germany's traditional preference for fiscal probity but also strove to accommodate the acute financial needs of the southern eurozone member countries in order to keep the eurozone intact. The *ego* role expectations in this situation focused on the two objectives of sound domestic public finances and keeping the eurozone together. The *alter* role expectations, however, emphasized Germany's responsibility to help overcome the crisis, downplaying the implications for Germany's own public financial position and the consequences of "moral hazard" through accommodating the economic policy preferences of Southern European countries for debt-financed growth (Dehousse/Fabry 2010; Sandbu 2015).

In fact, by first accepting huge financial rescue packages to help Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain manage their public debt crises and then by tacitly tolerating, if not encouraging, the European Central Bank to smother the crisis with its monetary policy of "whatever it takes", Germany may have chosen the worst of all possible options (Sandbu 2015: 219f). However that may be, it was clear that German policies were decisive in shaping the European responses to the crisis, and that they were controversial: in Greece, both Angela Merkel and her finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who came to epitomize the German policy response in public perceptions across Europe, were reviled in terms that drew explicit parallels to the Nazi period of European history (Hellmann 2016). The specific role segment of Germany's policies within the eurozone now became hotly contested both within Germany and abroad. The result was that those policies were politicized domestically as well as internationally: Berlin no longer could have its cake and eat it, as it were, by shaping Europe by stealth.

powerful woman" in the world for the seventh consecutive time by Forbes Magazine. In 2015, she was also chosen by TIME as the Person of the Year. See also: Minton Beddoes, Zanny: Europe's Reluctant Hegemon, in: The Economist, June 15, 2013 (Special Report), available at: <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21579140-germany-now-dominant-country-europe-needs-rethink-way-it-sees-itself-and> [March 24, 2018]. In fact, the German government seemed to adopt that perspective of Germany as a rising power itself with a Policy Paper entitled: Globalisierung gestalten – Partnerschaften ausbauen – Verantwortung teilen. See Bundesregierung 2012, Konzept der Bundesregierung, Berlin 2012, available at: <http://www.bogota.diplo.de/contentblob/3606954/Daten/2357167/Gestaltungsmachtekonzepdt.pdf> [Sept. 5, 2017]

The Migration Crisis

The second major crisis to hit European integration over the last decade was the refugee crisis of 2015 (The Economist 2015). When asylum seekers and migrants, many of them from war-torn Syria, started to flood into Europe via Turkey, the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkan route in their hundred thousands, Berlin unilaterally decided to open Germany's borders to those refugees stranded in South Eastern Europe. Initially, this move was popular within Germany, and it further improved Germany's (and Angela Merkel's) image abroad as the torch-bearer of civilized politics ("Merkel the bold. On refugees, Germany's Chancellor is brave, decisive and right", in: The Economist, Sept. 5, 2015). Yet as in the eurozone crisis, Berlin's initial policy soon changed to reconcile divergent and potentially contradictory domestic, European and international policy objectives. As in the response to the eurozone crisis, the refugee policies quickly became contested both domestically and internationally (The Economist 2015; Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2015). However, in the refugee crisis Germany's power and influence over other EU member states were much more limited. Germany's efforts to distribute asylum seekers within the European Union based on quota for each member state, while formally adopted, were at best partly successful in practice. Faced with contradictory expectations from both within and without, Berlin reverted to a more traditional leadership style that focused on building consensus and brokering compromise solutions (such as the European Union deal with Turkey to contain the flow of refugees from Syria to Europe) that involved Germany accepting a large share of the costs of conflict management (in this case, by accepting – both in absolute numbers and in relative terms, i.e. as a ratio of the population – the largest influx of refugees among the big member states).⁶ Still, as a result of the politicization of the refugee issue both within Germany and within Europe, Germany's leadership role and policies once more were heavily criticized.

The Crisis of the Pan-European Security Order

The third recent crisis in which Germany assumed a key role concerned the relationship with Russia. As a result of persistent state failure and political instability in the Ukraine, the pro-Russian leadership in Kiev, torn between conflicting pressures and inducements from Russia and the European Union, was toppled by a public revolt and eventually replaced by a pro-Western government. Moscow responded by occupying and annexing the Crimea and supporting secessionist movements in Eastern Ukraine (Charap/Colton 2017: 114-141).

Again, the key role of brokering a common European and indeed a Western po-

⁶ In relative terms, Sweden absorbed the largest inflow of refugees, but the left-wing government in Stockholm eventually was forced to shift its policies towards a heavily restrictive approach. Among the large member states, Italy found itself in a particularly exposed position due to geographic factors, but many refugees wanted to move on within the European Union. See The Economist 2015.

sition fell on Germany. Together with France, Germany negotiated the Minsk agreements that to this day define the – as yet unrealized - outlines of a political compromise solution for the conflict. To put pressure on Russia, Germany supported a package of European economic sanctions against Russia but resolutely refused to contemplate military measures advocated by more hawkish elements in the United States, such as arming the Ukraine. Since Germany accounted for the largest share of EU trade with and foreign direct investment in Russia, the costs of the sanctions had to be borne disproportionately by German business (Adomeit 2017).

Once more, Berlin was faced with rather divergent expectations both at home and abroad, and again the government opted for the traditional form of German leadership that combined the search for a common approach with a willingness to assume a disproportionate part of the costs of the policies adopted.

Overall, then, it appears as if Germany's domineering approach in the eurozone crisis management may represent a rather untypical case. Moreover, even in that case, the actual policies of Germany clearly represented an effort to reconcile Germany's domestically induced policy preferences with its traditional pro-integrationist approach to the European Union. This came across most clearly in Angela Merkel's famous phrase: "Scheitert der Euro, scheitert Europa" (Merkel 2010). This statement outlined one crucial assumption made by the Merkel government in this crisis, and it had two important implications. The assumption is obvious: the German government held that any break-up of the eurozone would endanger the whole edifice of European integration and thus undermine the overriding policy objective that German foreign policy had pursued since West Germany was founded in 1949. The first implication is that Berlin would do "whatever it takes" to keep the eurozone together, and – if need be - accept significant costs in doing so. The second implication was that keeping the eurozone together represented a very high, perhaps the highest foreign policy priority for Berlin. Although both at home and abroad role expectations concerning Germany's policies in Europe had become more diverse and more contradictory, Berlin was able to secure support for policies that stayed reasonably close to its traditional civilian power role concept, though they were clearly "leaner and meaner" than before the crisis.

What has changed since 2009 is a widespread perception abroad that Germany's international stature, power and influence had risen recently and would continue to rise further. This perception may have been encouraged by the rather single-minded focus of the CDU/CSU/FDP coalition government led by Angela Merkel from 2009 to 2013 on two foreign policy issues: the eurozone crisis and the pursuit of "strategic" partnerships with the so-called "rising powers", such as China, India, Brazil and Russia, which were pursued to strengthen Germany's export industries. It was therefore perhaps hardly surprising (but still mislead-

ing) that observers found German foreign policies to carry a whiff of mercantilism; they therefore characterized those policies as the policies of a “geo-economic power” (Kundnani 2011; Szabo 2015).⁷

The Domestic Context of German European Policy

Role theory assumes that in international affairs, states function as unitary actors. Modelling states as black boxes implies that their internal workings may be neglected for the purposes of foreign policy analysis. This assumption seems justified if one or both of the following conditions apply. First, the domestic politics that shape foreign policy decisions and, ultimately, a role concept permit coherent and consistent foreign policy results over time and across issue areas. Second, the international environment imposes coherence and consistency on a state’s foreign policy. In either case, the domestic politics of foreign policy decision-making are likely to be top-down, with strong leadership by the foreign policy establishment (i.e., the government leaders and their entourage; parliamentary parties; the foreign and security policy bureaucracies; foreign policy-related interest groups; and think tanks, the media and the attentive public).

Do those circumstances apply to German foreign policy? They certainly both did before unification, when German foreign policy was confronted with a dangerous, highly militarized conflict between two antagonistic blocks. Since then, Germany has been surrounded by friendly countries, and external threats to German security have become much less obvious and more diffuse. Coherence and consistency of German foreign policy may also have been affected by a tendency towards complexity and fragmentation in policy-making, driven by the logics of federalism and coalition politics, the proliferation of vested interests and advocacy groups, and a shift in political priorities away from external relations towards domestic issues.⁸

We do not know enough about decision-making processes in German foreign policy in recent years to come to a clear conclusion,⁹ but there does seem to be

⁷ I explain why this claim is misleading in Maull 2018. If Germany were indeed a geo-economic power of the kind suggested by Kundnani and Szabo, Berlin would not have imposed sanctions on Russia after the annexation of the Crimea. In fact, of course, Germany even took the lead in persuading other EU member states to follow that policy line and has managed to keep this coalition together at least to the time of this writing (September 2017).

⁸ That shift is obvious when we consider the changing composition of the federal budget and its development over time: the share of the external sector (which groups together public expenditure on defense, diplomacy and development assistance) fell from over 20 per cent to a low of 13.3 in 2011, to rise slowly again to 15.4 per cent (2017). See Hellmann 2016; own calculations based on official data taken from <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/75833/umfrage/ausgabenstruktur-im-bundeshaushalt/> [Sept. 10, 2017].

⁹ But see, e.g., Hellmann, Gunther/Baumann, Rainer/ Bösche, Monika/Herboth, Benjamin/ Wagner, Wolfgang: De-Europeanization by Default? Germany’s EU Policy in Defense and Asylum, in: Foreign Policy Analysis (2005)1, pp. 143-164 und Maull 2012.

evidence for considerable influence of domestic interest groups on German foreign policy, to the detriment of foreign policy cohesion and consistency, and possibly also its quality: if important foreign policy decisions were guided by narrow sectoral domestic considerations or domestic political tactics, this could damage Germany's national interests. An example of this may have been the famous decision of the German government to abstain in the UN Security Council vote on UNSCR 1973 in 2011, which authorized the use of force against the Libyan government to protect the uprising in Eastern Libya against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi (Maull 2011). This crisis coincided with a regional election in Germany, in which considerable stakes were at play for the Free Democrats, the smaller party in Merkel's coalition government; the leader of the Free Democrats, Guido Westerwelle, served as Foreign Minister and may have wanted to polish his credentials as the torch-bearer of the foreign policy "culture of restraint". Others include German policies on asylum and security, on energy and on emissions in the context of the European Union (Hellmann et al. 2004). There also has been what Sebastian Harnisch and others call "domestication": the backlash led by the Länder and the Bundestag against the dominant position of the Executive in foreign and European policy making and the constraints imposed on the latter, in particular, by the Constitutional Court (Harnisch 2006).

To the extent German foreign policy coherence and consistency has been degraded by such intrusions of domestic interests and priorities in ways that would affect Germany's national interests, this would devalue the role theoretical approach as an analytical tool. As I have argued elsewhere, the evidence overall suggests that there has been an erosion in German foreign policy coherence, consistency and effectiveness, but not yet to a degree that would undermine the analytical and explanatory value of a role theoretical approach (Maull 2018).

The International Context of German European Policy

The end of the Cold War dramatically transformed not only Germany itself, but also Germany's foreign policy environment, within Europe, but also beyond. The commitment to foreign policy continuity in the mold of "civilian power" therefore seemingly represented a paradox. From Germany's perspective, however, it still made sense to work for civilizing international relations in this new, uncertain and fluid environment within and beyond Europe, and "effective multilateralism" (EU 2004), an essential aspect of Germany's foreign policy role concept, indeed seemed to be a good way to promote that objective.

Yet Germany's ability to contribute to civilizing international relations depended, apart from its willingness to do so, on three important preconditions largely outside Germany's control. Those three preconditions were a) influential partners that were willing to work closely with the civilian power Germany, b) vibrant

international institutions to help make multilateralism “effective”, and c) an international environment that had undergone civilizing processes at least to some extent. The key here was the absence of violence as a way to settle conflicts within and between nations. As the international context in which German foreign policy was conducted continued to evolve since 1990, all three preconditions became increasingly precarious, forcing Germany to re-think and modify its traditional foreign policy orientations.

Partners: France, the US, Russia

Traditionally, West Germany’s most important partners had been – in that order - the United States, France (and the other members of the original European Community), the United Kingdom and, in a rather different way, the Soviet Union as the principal threat to West Germany’s security and the holder of the key to relations with East Germany. With the end of the Cold War, those countries remained united Germany’s most important partners, but with some subtle changes: France, rather than the United States now assumed the number one position as indispensable partner, while Russia, the successor state to the Soviet Union, ceased to be a military threat and became a potential partner in several new ways. Russia was a country in transition towards a new political and socio-economic order that needed external support and looked to Germany as its principal source of modernization. Russia was a key member of the new pan-European order that was now institutionalized in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) (renamed to become the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in January 1995. Finally, Russia represented a defeated former Superpower that needed to be reconciled with its past and its new role in world politics.

With the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, the partnership with the United States underwent important changes, particularly since the year 2000. The first administration of George W. Bush from the beginning sharply veered away from the multilateralist policies of its predecessors on, among other issues, climate change policies, arms control with Russia, and the multilateral regimes to contain the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons (Daalder/O’Hanlon 2003). Its response to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on Sept. 11, 2001 further exacerbated tensions within the German – U.S. alliance despite the initial strong expressions of solidarity with America and active support for its military intervention in Afghanistan by Germany. The first deep crisis in the transatlantic relationship erupted over the U.S. military intervention in Iraq, which Berlin refused to support in the UN Security Council (Szabo 2004; Joetze 2010). A further shock came with the revelations of Edward Snowden about the activities of U.S. intelligence agencies in Germany, including the hacking of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s cellphone (Kundnani

2016). Finally, there was the election of Donald Trump as 45th president of the United States and the first experiences in their personal encounters that caused Angela Merkel publicly to muse about the reliability of the United States as a partner for Germany.¹⁰ At the time of this writing, in the fall of 2017, there can be no doubt that the relationship between Germany and America has undergone a profound transformation that will weaken the ability of the two governments to work together effectively in civilizing international relations.

Since 1990, Germany's most important bilateral relationship in its foreign relations has been with France, rather than with America (Krotz/Schild 2013: 218f). Yet that relationship, too, has been significantly undermined, mostly by the deep crisis of France's socio-economic model and its political system (ibid.: 242-5). The repercussions of the international financial and economic crisis in 2009/2010 laid bare the profound structural problems of the French economy, and three successive presidents (Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy, and Francois Hollande) showed themselves unwilling or unable to address and resolve those problems. The end of the Cold War and German unification had resulted in a shift in the relative weight of France and Germany within the European Community, now reborn as the European Union; the introduction of the euro, which France had hoped would work against a German preponderance within European integration, did little to halt that shift. Moreover, successive enlargements of the European Union, and notably the "big bang" enlargement of 2004 that brought ten new members into the European Union, significantly diluted the weight of any individual member state; it affected France particularly strongly through the loss of its formerly dominant position in the political culture of European institutions. While Paris and Berlin tried hard to keep up the appearances of the Franco-German tandem, since 2010 at the latest, the imbalances and the inherent weaknesses of that bilateral relationship have become all too apparent. The revival of the Franco-German partnership had to await the denouement of the socio-economic and political crisis of France, which may now have begun with the implosion of the old party system of the French Vth Republic and the electoral victory of Emmanuel Macron.

Since the turn of the century, the German partnership with Russia also has become increasingly fragile (Adomeit 2017; for a different view: Szabo 2015). The

¹⁰ How badly the first encounter between President Trump and Chancellor Merkel must have been can be gauged from the remarkable account by veteran journalist and commentator Roger Cohen: *The Offender of the Free World*, in: *New York Times*, March 28, 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/opinion/the-offender-of-the-free-world.html> [Sept. 18, 2017]. The Chancellor later publicly observed that Europe could no longer fully rely on the United States and had to take care of its fate itself („Die Zeiten, in denen wir uns auf andere völlig verlassen konnten, die sind ein Stück weit vorbei und deshalb kann ich nur sagen, wir Europäer müssen unser Schicksal wirklich in die eigene Hand nehmen“). See: *Enormer Wandel der politischen Rhetorik*, in: *FAZ*, May 29, 2017, available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/bundestagswahl/rede-von-angela-merkel-so-reagieren-die-medien-15037304.html> [Sept. 18, 2017].

“Modernisierungspartnerschaft” failed because the Russian economy was badly suited for it and the Russian leadership was not interested in reforming it. The pan-European regional order of the OSCE was undermined domestically in many of the former Soviet republics, including Russia itself, by the rise of authoritarianism and corruption, and internationally by a lack of sensibility and the desire to push one’s own advantage as the “winners” in the East-West conflict (Sakwa 2015). Finally, the opportunity to reconcile Russia with its past and its new role was undermined domestically by the rise of Vladimir Putin and his associates, and internationally by the aggressive unilateralism of the George W. Bush presidency from 2001 to 2009 that *inter alia* sought to enlarge NATO to include Georgia, Moldova and – most alarmingly for Moscow – the Ukraine (Charap/Colton 2017).

Institutions: The WTO, the EU and the Eurozone, NATO, the UN, the OSCE

As a civilian power, Germany depends on effective multilateral institutions for at least two important reasons. First, the civilian power role concept implies a degree of international specialization and therefore also of vulnerability. It therefore benefits from an environment in which rules are respected and violence shunned, and finds it particularly difficult to operate in environments that are “uncivilized”. Second, multilateral institutions can function as “force multipliers” to enhance Germany’s international influence and recognition. Germany depends on that, as its power portfolio is skewed towards the “soft” end of the spectrum of power resources, and its overall weight in world politics is limited, despite its strong economy and large export sector, by its size and population.

Among the international institutions that are crucial for underpinning Germany’s foreign policy, only one continues to function reasonably well. This is the **World Trade Organization**, the successor to the old General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade that had governed world trade outside the socialist block during the Cold War. When the WTO was established on Jan. 1st, 1995, this was a hugely important international achievement; it significantly strengthened the international order in a key realm that was particularly important and beneficial for Germany. Although there are significant uncertainties that overshadow the future of the WTO (notably its failure to complete any significant new measures of trade liberalization during the Doha Round, and the shift towards regional and bilateral free trade agreements), the WTO at the time of writing represents one of the few vibrant elements in the present international order (Hoekman forthcoming).

Enlargement and the deepening of the **European Union**, including the Economic and Monetary Union that led to the establishment of the euro as the single currency for (at this time) 19 member states of the EU, were similarly important and consequential for Germany. Unlike the WTO, however, the eurozone and the

European Union have been in crisis since 2010 at the latest (Bouin 2017). This has two important implications for Germany as a civilian power. First, the crisis of European integration absorbs a lot of German energy and resources that otherwise might be available for other purposes. Second, the crisis of the EU largely deprives Germany of the force multiplier that a vibrant EU could represent as a force in world politics. In many ways, the EU itself may be considered a civilian power; it thus could be an ideal partner for Germany's efforts to civilize international relations. Yet so far, the record of the EU in promoting that objective has been underwhelming (Toje 2010).

NATO continues to be important as the ultimate guarantor of Germany's hard security against certain types of threats, as well as the institution that in many ways both represents and embeds the bilateral partnership with the United States. NATO's troubles probably are less severe than those of the EU, but they are real nonetheless. Some of them are, in fact, related to the problems of the EU. As the commitment of the United States to European security battles against the rise of China in East Asia and a new wave of American isolationism domestically, Europe will have to take on greater responsibility for providing security in Europe and its neighborhood to the East and South. This, however, presupposes effective multilateral security cooperation among the Europeans, be it in NATO or in the EU. So far, however, they have not been willing to assume that burden in either of the two organizations.

Finally, there is the OSCE, as the institutional framework for the pan-European regional order and the multilateral context for Germany's relationship with Russia. The OSCE has always been the weakest of Germany's multilateral institutional force multipliers. In the early 1990s, it was unable to prevent the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, and could do little to contain similar conflicts between former Soviet republics. It suffered from a blatant misfit between the liberal democratic and humanitarian vision of its Charter of Paris and the authoritarian and repressive realities in many of its member states. And it did nothing to sustain the pan-European regional order when Russia and the West moved apart over the last decade, and very little to contain the violence and tensions between the two sides when they fell out with each other over Ukraine in 2013/14 (Charap/Colder 2017).

Violence and the Use of German Forces

Already in the early years of the 1990s, events in the Persian Gulf demonstrated that the world, that even Europe were much less civilized places than Germany would have liked. At that time, however, it still was preoccupied with the aftermath of unification, and therefore decided to confine its participation in the liberation of Kuwait largely to a huge check to underwrite the U.S. war effort. Then

came the wars in former Yugoslavia. They taught a reluctant Germany that under certain circumstances it had to accept the use of military force as a necessary means to advance civilizing international relations. Thus, the *Bundeswehr* participated in the NATO enforcement missions in Bosnia in 1995 (with a mandate by the UN Security Council), and over Kosovo in 1999 (without such a mandate, which had been vetoed by Russia). It also played an important role in stabilizing the precarious peace in the Balkans since 1995 (Philippi 1996; Maull 2000).

The decision to support the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and international efforts to re-build the Afghan state after the Taliban regime then hammered the lesson home: the *Bundeswehr* mission in Afghanistan, the Germans came to realize, was not humanitarian and development work carried out by soldiers but a brutal war involving casualties and moral uncertainties. Public support for military force projection vanished, the “culture of restraint” once more flourished. Germany would be a civilian power, not a warrior state (Flemes/Ebert 2016: 6-8; Peltzer 2017).

Conclusion

Is Germany a “rising power”? We have considered this question with regard to Berlin’s new role in Europe, and the answer, unsurprisingly, is nuanced. There certainly has been a change in the perception of Germany’s role, both abroad and within the country itself. There also have been instances (such as the eurozone crisis) where German leadership has been forceful and single-minded. Against this, there are other cases, however, in which German leadership has been more traditional (as in the migration crisis and, most obviously, in the Ukraine crisis). This traditional form of German leadership within Europe might be called “leadership from behind”: it relies on assessing not only Germany’s own stakes, but also the interests of its partners, and on carefully building and sustaining policy coalitions based on common positions hammered out through patient diplomacy. This form of leadership also involves significant side payments: Germany will often assume a disproportionate share of the collective burden of those policies.

In both forms of leadership exercised by Germany, its “European vocation” (Paterson 2010) plays an important role: both Berlin’s foreign policy establishment and the attentive public continue to believe in the centrality of European integration. In that sense, as well as in its other core orientations, it is not so much Germany’s role concept that has changed as the context in which it has to be played out and the policies of its partners, as Frank-Walter Steinmeier, then still Foreign Minister, claimed with some justification (Steinmeier 2016).

Yet there are worrying signs of erosion and attrition surrounding Germany’s role as a “civilian power”, both abroad and at home. Internationally, it is changes within its key partner countries, such as the United States, Russia, and France (as well

as the UK and Italy) and the persistent difficulties of important international institutions (such as the EU, NATO, and the OSCE) that hamper the effectiveness of German foreign policy. Domestically, it is the growing constraints imposed on Germany's foreign policies by vested interests and civil society, and the robust intrusion of calculations of domestic politics into foreign policy decisions that interfere with Germany's foreign policy conduct. Behind all those new constraints, troubles and challenges in German Foreign policy are two ultimate troubling questions. First, what does Germany's commitment to Europe mean? What kind of Europe does Germany want, what kind of Europe would it be willing to accept and support, and to what extent would it be prepared to make sacrifices for this commitment? Second, what would Germany do if it had no effective multilateral institutions anymore, nor reliable partners?

Bio

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