



GERMANY'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

Pádraig Murphy

The Institute of International and European Affairs
Tel: (353) 1-874 6756.
Fax: (353) 1- 878 6880.
E-mail: reception@iiea.com.
Web: www.iiea.com

8 North Great Georges Street,
Dublin 1,
Ireland

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Written by Pádraig Murphy

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Paper designed by Brian Martin

After the Second World War, a number of German prisoners of war were interned in Britain. Understandably, they were all concerned to make some sense of the disaster that had befallen their country. In light also of the fact that they had little else to do, the officers among them fell naturally to brooding about this with their fellow captives in a particularly articulate way. Unsurprisingly, the British services were listening in, which is why we have a record of what was said. On 23 May 1945, Generalleutnant Ferdinand Heim said in a lecture to his fellow internees:

“Could the war have been won at all, even if no military mistakes had been made? From 1941 onwards at the latest it was just as much lost as the Great War because the political aims bore no relation whatsoever to Germany’s military and economic possibilities. The only thing Hitler’s peculiar method of waging war cost the German people was millions too many people killed. That’s the only thing – the war could not have been won. The remarkable thing is this, a thing about which I am always thinking: how is it that a country like Germany, which is situated in the middle of the continent, has not developed politics into an art, in order to maintain peace... We were so fatuously stupid as to think we could challenge the world...without seeing that that is impossible in the situation in which we find ourselves in Germany. What are the reasons for it?... I am no politician, I am no historian. I don’t know. I only see the question.”

We have here in a nutshell the dilemma of Germany’s place in the world. It is in the middle of the European continent. It is too large and powerful, even if only economically or commercially, to be anything else but a crucial factor in the overall European balance. Its leaders have been confronted, both historically and today, with the question of how this position is to be managed.

The answer they found on the foundation of the Federal Republic, still basically valid today, is two-fold. Germany would bind itself into the EEC/EC/EU for economic and, to an extent, political purposes, and to NATO for military purposes. In the very Preamble of the Grundgesetz adopted in 1949 the German people bind themselves “inspired by the will to serve the peace of the world as a member with equal rights in a united Europe”. This was at once seemingly prescient – it was to be, after all, another eight years before signature of the Treaty of Rome. On the other hand, it was not only in Germany that immediately after the War European integration was seen as essential to the future peace of the continent. 1949 was, in contrast, the very year of establishment of NATO and, as we know, German inclusion in the Western alliance was considered essential by the other allies, especially the US, and it was, so to speak, the certificate of respectability of the new Republic.

Article 23 of the Grundgesetz, the Constitution, provides that “with the aim of realising a united Europe the Federal Republic shall contribute to the development of a European Union which is committed to democratic, rule-of-law, social and federal principles and which guarantees an essentially comparable protection of basic rights”. Article 24, of more general application, provides that “The Federation can by law transfer sovereign rights to international organisations”.

These two orientations, to European integration and North Atlantic security, were what marked German foreign and security policy throughout the Cold War. There were external and internal limits to the margin of manoeuvre of these policies in this period. A basic characteristic of German policy after the years of Nazi terror and wars of conquest in the name of Germany was a reticence in German foreign policy when it came to the exercise of political power. German foreign and security policy was marked by an emphasis on being bound in by others, as well as by an underlining of interconnection and multilateralism.

While the basic principles of German foreign and security policy have not changed, the sense of the country’s margin of manoeuvre has. Germany saw itself after the fall of the Wall confronted with a fundamentally changed geopolitical environment and to that extent with new, decidedly geopolitical challenges. The first reflex of policy after the end of the Cold War was that Germany was responsible for the export of stability to its newly liberated Central and Eastern European neighbours. This was a much cited theme of Volker Rühe, Defence Minister in Kohl’s cabinets from 1992 to 1998. Rühe was the main protagonist of NATO enlargement to East and Central Europe. He pushed this agenda against Foreign Ministry, and some American – Strobe Talbott, for example – hesitations on the basis of the negative effects on relations with Russia. Many would agree with the French scholar H el ene Carr ere d’Encausse that this approach contributed to alienating Russia from any association with the European integration project. A second example was Western policy on recognition of the Yugoslav successor states. Here, after the declaration of independence of Croatia and Slovenia, while the EC Foreign Ministers

hesitated, Foreign Minister Genscher, under great pressure from his own public opinion, forced the issue, going ahead with recognition before an EC consensus was achieved. A third example is energy policy. Here too, Germany, conscious of its own special needs, its proximity to and budding special relationship with Russia, has hoed its own row sometimes while neglecting the interests of the countries between.

There has, of course, been quite a lot of debate in Germany on the new orientation of its foreign policy. The change has been minimised by some. Other commentators would have liked it to go much further. Gregor Schöllgen, Professor of Modern History at Erlangen and guest professor in New York, Oxford and London, for instance, in an essay on 'Germany's Return to the World Stage' in 2004, saw the Franco-German axis as a kind of power counterbalance, even considering the Federal Republic as "the leading power counterbalance to the USA". Hans Ulrich Seidt, a former German Ambassador to Afghanistan, again in 2004, paints a broadbrush picture of the future area of influence of Germany and Europe. Starting from the engagement of the Bundeswehr in Bosnia and Afghanistan, he sees these as the western and eastern borders of an area that he calls "the strategic ellipse", including in the north the Black Sea and the Caucasus, in the south running from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. He considers the long-term political, economic and cultural presence of Germany and Europe in this resource-rich area to be "essential to maintaining existence".

In practice, German policy since 1989, while it has given rise to some misgivings, has been less alarming than some of these perhaps abstract intellectual exercises seemed to foreshadow. Recognition of Slovenia and Croatia was soon followed by all other Western countries. The ignoring of neighbours' interests in pursuing energy supplies from Russia has been kept within limits. The other innovations were the deployment of the Bundeswehr out of area in Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan. These were agreed by Berlin only after much pressure from its allies and, indeed, would have to be considered failures if support in Germany's own public opinion were to be taken as a decisive factor. Perhaps for this reason, Germany very ostentatiously refused to bow to American pressure on the Iraq War, and has also been conspicuously absent from the NATO operation in Libya and the tentative but failed one mounted more recently against Syria. As far as NATO expansion is concerned, Germany has been the most prominent among those who doubted the wisdom of extending membership to the Ukraine and Georgia. Although Angela Merkel could not in the end resist George W. Bush's pressure to agree at the April 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit that these two countries would become members of NATO, Germany subsequently took the view that the Organisation should not commit to receiving members with unresolved territorial problems – easily read as concern for Russian sensitivities. The subsequent Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 undoubtedly strongly reinforced this approach. Indeed today the status of Membership Action Programme, conceded in principle to the Ukraine and Georgia at Bucharest, no longer figures in NATO's agenda.

The new post-Cold-War orientation as seen today shows a continuing concern with the central position in Europe and the special relationship with Russia. ("Special" in this case is not intended to be analogous with the better-known 'Special Relationship', that between the UK and the US). The place of Russian policy in the post-War German scheme of things has rightly been characterised as a rollercoaster. Relations reached their height under Chancellor Schröder, who famously called Vladimir Putin a democrat of the purest water, and joined the board of Gazprom after leaving the Chancellorship. The policy is of course, along with the general concern with Central and Eastern Europe, an instance of stability policy, but no longer figures as such presentationally. There is also an apparent change in the nature of the commitment to NATO, instanced in the refusal to be involved in the Libya operation. Here, although NATO could not have proceeded at all without German approval in principle, in the course of operations, Germany went so far as to withdraw German AWACS aircraft already *in situ*. Another instance was the refusal to participate in the abortive Syria operation. An undoubted, though undeclared, factor is scepticism regarding the American rôle, both because of the "pivot" to Asia and a perceived incompetence in the current Administration, aggravated by the NSA controversy.

FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY IN THE COALITION AGREEMENT

The Coalition Agreement breaks no new ground in regard to foreign and security policy. But the accents it sets are significant.

Firstly, it reiterates that European integration is Germany's most important task, acknowledges German responsibility in this regard, and commits to making every effort to this end. Significant, in the light of some of the positions taken by Angela Merkel in the recent past, is the explicit commitment to the Community method, which is said to be "at the core of European unification". The rôles of the European Parliament, the Commission (also significant in view of what has been said above) and of national Parliaments are emphasised in the context of the need to further develop democratic legitimation. The German language must be put on a par with English and French. Germany will take special account of the interests of the small and medium-sized Member States. Merkel's conditional sympathy with Cameron is already known. A nod to this is the demand for a reduction in bureaucracy, with a targeted list of reduced regulation to be demanded of the Commission. A stronger rôle for the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy is advocated. The EU needs more than ever a strategic discussion, which it can achieve by civil means above all, but, if necessary, also with military deployment. Further enlargement is foreseen to include the Western Balkans, where Serbia and Kosovo have further homework to do. The terms used for Turkey's candidacy are artful: in saying the negotiations have no predetermined outcome, they effectively all but exclude the prospect of full membership.

The commitment to NATO is reiterated, but participation has to be in the context of full consultation and coordination. The Transatlantic partnership is of fundamental importance for both Europe and North America. It is based on a foundation of common values and interests and therefore continues to be the key to freedom, security and prosperity for all. But where trust has recently been put in question, it has to be restored. (This is a reference to the NSA debacle). "Here, we await a clear commitment and corresponding measures from the US Administration. We want clearer definitions of the rules which apply to relations between partners and work towards credible and verifiable agreements which will protect the private sphere of our citizens."

The Agreement calls for an open dialogue and broader cooperation with Russia, given that Russia is closely linked to Germany by a history which has seen good and bad times. "Russia is the biggest and most important neighbour of the European Union". But, in relations with Russia, Germany will take account of the legitimate interests of its common neighbours.

Germany is ready to take greater responsibility in the UN, including a permanent SECCO seat, but aims at a permanent EU seat.

CONCLUSION

As it prepares to embark on a new governmental period, Germany is in a very uncertain geopolitical position. Its relations with the US, while still central, have had shadows cast on them by a supposed 'pivot' in US priorities, by repeated miscalls in US foreign policy – Iraq, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Russia – and by perceived, if unacknowledged, lack of confidence in the current Administration. At the same time, the Franco-German axis in the EU is broken, and there is a profound lack of confidence from Berlin in the Hollande Administration, to such an extent indeed that many Germans say they want to cover themselves by developing more privileged relations with others. This is bad for the other Member States, as an essential motor is not even sputtering. It could be particularly ominous were the German Government to seek a compensating particular relationship with the UK Government of David Cameron. However, the German preoccupation here seems to be with persuading the UK to remain in the EU, at the cost of perhaps reducing the mountain of regulation coming from Brussels, without prejudicing the basic rationale of the Union. This is certainly the picture that emerges from the Coalition Agreement, where particular importance must be attached from our point of view to the renewed commitment to the classical Community method and the rôle of the Commission, as well as to taking account of the smaller Member States. The increased involvement of the Constitutional Court in matters of European integration also has to be taken into account, though it appears that it will not be opposed to further steps that meet very stringent democratic-legitimation requirements.

Angela Merkel is certainly no visionary in the mould of Adenauer or Kohl, her persona being more that of a political incarnation of the schwäbische hausfrau, with her mantra of Europe having 7% of the world's population, 25% of its GDP and 50% of its social spending. She is a pragmatist and at best an agnostic when it comes to the classical European vision. But she has proved to be a highly effective Federal Chancellor in that office's capacity of managing coalitions. In that sense we

can be happy with the line taken in the Coalition Agreement. In general, the posture of the German Government in foreign affairs in the world, seems, taking account of the radically changed international environment, to be the same benevolent one that the world had become accustomed to since the War. Generalleutnant Ferdinand Heim would no longer be perplexed by his country, which has taken its place as an important and respectable member of the international community.

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