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Summary

‘Germany’s role in the world’

A study of identity perceptions in the debate on Germany’s foreign and security policy since 1990

With the reunification of Germany on the 3rd of October 1990, the obvious question that haunted both international and German intellectuals was whether a reunited Germany would once again become the problem child of Europe. Given the troublesome history of the ‘German question’ (*deutsche Frage*), it was unclear if Germany would continue the constructive course the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had chosen. Many analysts feared, based on neorealist and neoliberal theoretical assumptions, that the increase of German power would result in conflicts. John Mearsheimer predicted for example that Europe would go “back to the future” with Germany attempting to dominate the continent again. The country would abandon its restrictive policy regarding the use of its army as an instrument of its foreign policy, and the country would lessen its integration in the EU to regain its sovereignty.

But Germany did nothing of the like. In fact, quite the contrary, the country still abstained from flexing its muscles although it was once again Europe’s ‘central power’. The country continued to refrain from expressing its sovereignty on military affairs, for example when it agreed to keep its forces integrated in NATO. The country also stimulated further European integration by accepting to give up one of its strongest national symbols, the German Mark, to establish a European Monetary Union. In short, the country continued its ‘principal multilateralism’, and its ‘culture of restraint’. It was clear that traditional theories could not explain the continuity of German foreign policy.

Nevertheless, things did change. Whereas a reunited Germany refused to join the coalition forces that drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in 1990 with a UN-mandate, the country did participate in the controversial intervention in Kosovo in 1999. And while Germany time and again affirmed its transatlantic loyalty in the early nineties, Germany was at the forefront of the opposition against the American policy towards Iraq in the summer of 2002.

To explain Germany’s foreign policy behaviour, this study uses a constructivist approach. Constructivists criticise traditional theories of being ‘under socialised’. To explain a country’s foreign policy, constructivists claim it is necessary to take ideational concepts like culture, beliefs, ideology and identity into consideration. To take account of the ideational component of German foreign and security policy, this study analyses the debate on Germany’s foreign and security policy since 1990. It is in articles and books written by the country’s (academic) foreign policy elite that the ‘appropriate’ foreign policy options for Germany are being discussed.

In general, one can distinguish different lines of reasoning in these publications. These different ‘narratives’ or ‘discourses’ link Germany’s past, its present, its future, its values, its interests, in a coherent way with an analysis of the outside world. By studying what lessons are being draw from the country’s troubled past in each narrative, how they view the international environment, how they perceive expectations about Germany’s role from ‘relevant others’ (its European allies and the United States), what fundamental convictions they carry about the future of the nation state, European integration and the use of force in international politics, and how analysts that contribute to a certain narrative reposition themselves when changes occur in the international environment, we can distillate a detailed picture of the different perceptions of Germany’s foreign policy identity. A foreign policy identity can be defined as: “a nation’s vision of its actual and appropriate positions and

actions within the international system. This vision, in turn, is based on the special characteristics, roles and missions elites ascribe to their nation and its state.".[1430] The (constructivist) claim of this study is that through an analysis of the different foreign policy identities in Germany, one knows *how* the foreign policy elite perceive the world, how they see Germany's role in Europe, its role in the transatlantic relations and the county's role in security questions. This way, one can get a picture of *why* Germany chooses the general direction of its foreign and security policy, and in what general direction it might be heading.
Discourse analysis is used to study the publications by which academics and politicians participated in the debate. Using this methodology it is possible to 'filter' the identity perception of the author from their work. Besides books, all relevant articles in the German journals *Europa-Archiv/Internationale Politik* and *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* have been used as source, as well as an extensive number of relevant articles from the journals *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, and *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. This way a cross-section of the German debate on the country's foreign and security policy is covered.
Like any other collective identity, Germany's foreign policy identity is a contested identity. Different commentators have different worldviews and they all want theirs to be the most dominant in the discourse. In the contemporary German foreign and security debate, one can distinguish three relatively coherent schools of thought about what Germany's role is or ought to be in European politics, transatlantic relations, and in security issues.

The first of these is the 'post national' identity perception. In this view, the Bonner Republic finally broke the spell of the German question. By not being a nation state, by not striving for sovereignty and power but by selflessly integrating itself in supranational and multilateral structures, and by its reluctance to use military force for other reasons than deterrence, West Germany had become a *Zivilmacht* (Civilian Power). According to the post national discourse, the reunified Germany should stick to this example.

In the 'realist' foreign policy identity the 'old' Bonner Republic was operating in such a different geopolitical setting, that the 'new' Berlin Republic should reassess its policy and political culture to be able to play its role as Europe's Central Power. Germans must free themselves from their fear of power. They should acknowledge that European cooperation is useful as a way to promote German interests, but the naïve supranational idealism must give way to a rational assessment of the fact that Germany is now, like the other European countries, a 'normal' nation state.

Central in the 'multilateral' perception of German identity is the fact that post-war Germany could become so successful by pragmatically constructing a dense web of multilateral and bilateral institutions that both helped to avoid fears in neighbouring countries about Germany's power and at the same time proofed instrumental in advancing Germany's interests. This successful strategy of multilateralism and modesty should be continued, albeit the fact that Germany's greater power forces the country to assume more responsibility within international organisations.

These identities can help us understand the relative continuity of the country's foreign policy over the years 1990-2003 and the changes that do take place especially since 1999. Since these are collective beliefs and since they provide a sense of stability by ordering the social environment, they are hard to change. But they are not static though. The German foreign policy elite had to react to international developments, with their fundamental beliefs and views on Germany's appropriate foreign policy role as their frame of reference. A thesis of this study is that the immense changes confronted commentators with the inadequacy of their

[1430] Wolf 2001, 2. Zie ook: Duffield 1998; Wendt 2001.

beliefs about the appropriate role of Germany in the world, thus forcing them to alter their identity. In this research, the period 1990-2003 is subdivided in three periods: 1990-1995, 1995-1999, and 1999-2003. The years 1995, 1999 and 2003 are considered 'breaking points' in German foreign policy thinking since in these years Germany participated for the first time in its post-war history in peacekeeping operations (Bosnia, 1995), respectively warfare (Kosovo, 1999), whereas Germany explicitly did *not* participate in Iraq (2003). Theories suggest that questions of war and peace in particular have a fundamental impact on the identity of a state. For it is when addressing these issues that basic questions about what a state represents, what it will fight for (if at all), who ones friends are, and who ones enemies, what values should be uphold etc, are being put to the test. By subdividing the post-reunification era in these three periods it is possible to see how external "traumatic" events influence the German self image.

Continuity or new beginning? (1990-1995)

In 1990-1995 the international environment changed significantly. After the remarkable long stability of the Cold War that lasted four decades, the whole world was in transition. The result was that all beliefs underpinning the three identity perceptions had to be fundamentally reviewed. A number of events were particularly important in the reshaping of German foreign policy identities. First of all, there was the German reunification. Did this mean that the 'old German Reich' was back in its European central position, or did it merely mean that the FRG got a little bit bigger but would otherwise continue as if nothing happened? Secondly, there was the new élan in European integration, culminating in the Maastricht Treaty. This forced German analysts to think about the future of the EU and about the role Germany had to play in this new Europe. The third question facing commentators in these years was the new European security landscape. Would the US remain committed to European stability now the Soviet-Union was gone? What about NATO? What was its function now? Should Germany keep up its close ties to the US or should it rather work towards an all-European peace order based on the CSCE? The major topic in the foreign policy debate in these early years though, was the possible participation of Germany in multilateral peace keeping and enforcing operations. To everyone's surprise, the end of the cold war led to a return of 'hot' wars. The first one that challenged thinking in Germany about war and conflict, was the Gulf War of 1990. Regarding that war, German political leaders claimed that due to constitutional constraints, the country could not participate in military conflicts outside NATO's treaty area. However, Germany did pay a major part of the bill of US operations. This 'chequebook diplomacy' did not answer the question whether Germany should participate in future military operations and under what circumstances. Due to the Yugoslav wars of secession this question became even more acute. Thousands died in the civil wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia. Should Germany send military forces as UN-blue helmets to an area where the Wehrmacht committed countless war crimes just 50 years ago? Should Germany reaffirm its Western orientation (*Westbindung*) by joining its Western partners, or did Germany have a 'special responsibility' to promote peace with exclusively civil and diplomatic means? It should be noted that in 1994 the legal question was solved; according to the constitutional court, Germany *could* participate in multilateral operations. This still did not answer the question whether Germany actually *should*.

In the post national identity perception, all these changes did not mean that Germany had to reconsider its traditional foreign policy role; quite the contrary, Germany should stick to its Civilian Power role. Reunification was initially opposed and later used as an argument to strengthen European integration. A German national state was considered to potentially be so dangerous that Germany had a moral and historical obligation to integrate itself evermore in supranational structures. With regard to transatlantic relations, fears of a sovereign,

renationalised, militaristic Germany determined the outlook in this narrative. Close relations with the US were regarded as necessary to delude fear among Germany's neighbours. What did lead to a slightly less positive perception of the US was the fact that that country wanted Germany to take on a more active role in international politics, in particular in security issues. It was the security role of the reunified Germany that led to a schism in the post national identity in 1990-1995. Pacifist arguments, that stressed that German history obliged the country to forfeit on military participation in 'out-of-area'-operations, were still very influential. However, with the war in Bosnia raging, especially after the fall of the UN-safe haven Srebrenica, an 'interventionist' post national argument won strength. In this perception, Germany with its dismal historical human rights record should now do everything to prevent human rights abuses, including participating with peace keepers in multilateral operations.

In the realist perception, reunification opened the possibility to completely overturn the supposedly existing post national consensus in Germany. The country should learn that it was a normal nation state again and should therefore adjust its foreign policy role. The country ought to stimulate intergovernmental European integration because that would strengthen the country's power base. Moral and historical arguments for a pro-integration stance and a continuation of the old 'culture of restraint', that play a role in the post national and multilateral discourse, are rejected since these would be overly naïve and idealistic. Germany was by its very size and power 'Europe's central power' (Schwarz) and should act accordingly. Geopolitical arguments were also used to advocate a bandwagon-strategy with the US. Since Germany still depended on American power, it should follow its transatlantic ally. Typical for this narrative was the argument that because of its increased power, reunified Germany should abandon its culture of restraint and align its military thinking with that of its Western partners. Just like them, Germany should have a 'normal' perception of the use of force in international politics and come to realise that in the former Yugoslavia, peace enforcement was the only way to pacify the conflict. *Bündnistreue* (loyalty to NATO) is brought forward as the main argument for Germany to participate in NATO's mission in the former Yugoslavia.

According to the multilateral foreign policy identity, the changes in 1989/90 meant that Germany should remain loyal to its principal multilateralism. Only by working through a system of 'interlocking institutions', and combining its interests with that of its partners, Germany could realise these interests with maximum efficiency and without being feared. However, Germany should also realise more that the weight of the country had grown and that its partners therefore expected it to take on more responsibilities to shape its international environment. Germany could therefore no longer evade participating in multilateral peace missions when international partners asked to do so.

Apparent impasse in the foreign policy debate (1995-1999)

In the second half of the 1990s, developments hindered Germany to continue its pro-European foreign policy. As the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and the (lack of) developments surrounding the CFSP showed, the deepening of the European integration project barely made any progress. With the admittance of a large number of new applicant countries from 1998 onwards, it became clear that the process of widening the EU might hamper any prospect of deepening it. Transatlantic relations were also going through a difficult time. Trade disputes, disagreement about NATO's enlargement strategy and the difficulties of fighting a coalition war in Kosovo strained relations with the US. Finally, in the field of security policy, the crisis in, and subsequent controversial NATO air campaign over, Kosovo proved to be a major event that influenced the three identity perceptions in the years 1995-1999.

For the post national identity, the ideal of a supranational Europe turned out to be an illusion. Germany's major partners did not seem ready to give up their sovereignty to form a

federal political union. Furthermore, the identification with the US, albeit already questioned in the years before by more pacifist commentators, became increasingly difficult. Especially the Kosovo war, in which the US was seen as a militaristic hegemon that sacrificed the UN and the international legal order by trying to resolve the crisis with primarily military means, increased the distance to the US. Most fundamental was the change regarding the perception of the previously cherished culture of restraint. The ethnic cleansing in Kosovo led to a new view on Germany's security role in which a German participation in interventions for humanitarian purposes (within a multilateral framework) was seen as the most appropriate course of action for the country. Its problematic past now became a reason to stand up for human rights and peace, even when these had to be enforced by military means. Not "*Nie wieder Krieg*" but "*Nie wieder Auschwitz*" became the fundamental guiding principle for a German Civilian Power

For realists, the developments in Germany's international environment since 1990 seemed to proof that their assumptions were valid. The slowdown of the European integration process indicated that a European federation would not be realized, so the EU would remain a more sophisticated balance of power system. This meant that Germany had to stand up for its national interests, just like the others countries did. At the same time, the weakness of a divided EU to influence world affairs, as illustrated by the subordinate role of the European NATO-allies during the Kosovo war, increased the importance that was given to the realisation of a more united (confederal) Europe. Realists ascribed Germany a leadership role in this process. Close ties to the US and NATO remained central elements of this identity. The successful intervention in Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999 seemed to prove that Germany could only influence international relations when it followed the United States. The perception of the most appropriate security role for the reunified Germany also remained largely intact. Germany should (still) normalize its perception on the use of force to be able to remain allied to its Western partners, in particular the US.

The multilateral identity tried to stay loyal to the parameters of the 'old' identity of the FRG, like its pro-integration thinking. But external events forced an adaptation of these parameters. The reluctance of European partners to form a political union, made a German pro-integration course increasingly unrealistic. The problem was that a re-nationalization movement in Europe was detrimental for Germany's national interest so that Germany should oppose it. But at the same time, given these developments, Germany was forced to be more assertive about realizing its own national interests as well. Subsequently, in this narrative the view on Europe became more pragmatic and less idealistic. The same applied to the perception of the US. In the multilateral perspective, Germany should, through an enhancement of the EU's CFSP, become a stronger and more equal partner within NATO. The problem was that US foreign policy contradicted these ideals. By stressing NATO's enlargement, the US hindered a good relationship with Russia and because of trade disputes as well as the bad French-American relations it was difficult for Germany to continue its '*sowohl-als-auch*' (both-and) course. It became clear in this narrative that European *Westbindung* and transatlantic relations could be mutually incompatible.

<u>The new self awareness of a normal Western European state (1999-2003)</u>

In the years following the Kosovo campaign of 1999 a number of significant events forced commentators to adjust their perception of Germany's identity. The European integration process gained momentum with the creation of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the enlargement of the EU and the establishment of the European Convention that started working on a European Constitution. Germany's role in this process was ambiguous. On the one hand, the country continued to be a motor behind further integration, for example by Joschka Fischers input in the debate on Europe's *Finalitätsfrage*. On the other hand,

chancellor Gerhard Schröder took a less pro-European stance when Germany's national (economic) interests were considered to be threatened. The most important events in this period lay in the field of security. During the Kosovo war, Germany participated for the first time in its post war history in a combat operation. And this under the leadership of the most leftist government of the country's history. This was all the more remarkable since there was no mandate of the UN Security Council for the intervention. This 'realist' policy indicates that in the German political spectrum, left and right is not identical with post national and realist. The other landmark event was the Iraq crisis. During the crisis, Germany – also for the first time since 1949 – publicly opposed the United States in a military conflict. All these events influenced the identities that are reflected in the foreign policy discourse.

The new élan in European integration since 1999 revitalized the hope in the post national narrative that a European political union could be achieved. What did change however, was the perceived role of Germany in this integrating EU. Whereas a sense of pride in being German was still suspect in the 1990s, Germany's role in the Kosovo-conflict convinced many observers that the reunified country had truly become a Civilian Power. Moreover, Germany's constructive efforts to revitalize the EU looked favourable compared to the European politics of its major partners. A new post national self consciousness was visible in the fact that a leading role of Germany in the integration process was being proposed. It was argued that Germany could only avoid being pushed in the role of leading state in Europe, when it took new initiatives to further European integration. With regard to the perception of the use of force as an instrument of German foreign policy, the Kosovo-experience had definitely discredited a principal pacifism in this identity. But scepticism against military force without international political approval remained high. The image of the US as Germany's friend and natural ally had already suffered because of the Kosovo war. The war in Iraq worsened the image of the US. The United States were increasingly perceived as being a militaristic hegemony that did not share the same basic values as Germany/Europe. With a sense of self pride the 'German' and 'European' way was positioned against the American foreign policy. The post national German foreign policy identity was thus reconstructed in opposition to America. The delicate balance in this world view between pro-European and pro-transatlantic loyalties shifted to the former.

For developments in the realist foreign policy identity since 1999, the Kosovo-crisis was also of great importance. More than before, it was recognized that a strong EU was necessary for Germany to be able to effectively promote its national interests worldwide. Although analysts still thought Europe would remain a confederation in the future in which nation states would play a central role, they increasingly welcomed the idea of a united Europe. Power political reasons formed the basis of this reorientation. The obvious weakness of European countries in the Kosovo and the Iraq crisis force Germany to take on a self-conscious leadership role to promote European cooperation, according to realists. There were however two 'end goals' for promoting a stronger EU in this paradigm. One the one hand, 'Europeanists' argued that a strong EU was necessary to counterbalance American power in the world. 'Atlanticists' on the other hand, claimed that Germany and Europe were too dependent on the US to emancipate themselves too much. Only a strong Europe could remain a partner for the US. A bandwagon strategy was preferred in this narrative. In both perceptions, America is no longer considered a natural friend, but more a hegemonial power with a unilateral approach to international politics. As in the post national identity, the attachment to the US became less and less a matter of a positive identification based on mutual values. Close German-American ties were legitimized by more pragmatic reasons.

Based on the preferred foreign policy role as a *Handelsstaat* (trading state) there was agreement in the multilateral narrative that Germany should play a leading role in integrating Europe and should continue to tie itself in a web of international institutions. Both historical

arguments that refer to Germany's problematic past, as more power political arguments were used to support this policy. Only when a German 'gentle giant' successfully led Europe to a more unified EU would the country be able to play a leading role in Europe without raising suspicion. Despite the apparent stagnation of the deepening of the integration process in the late 1990s, a more unified EU was still regarded as Germany's prime national interest. This EU should be more or less similar to the federal construction of Germany itself, with nation states that have a relatively high amount of autonomy, and with federal institutions that can effectively take care of the policy fields that should be addressed on a European level (thereby making the future EU a mix between a federation and confederation). In this identity, Germany should play a central role in reviving the integration process and creating a EU that can more effectively operate on the international stage. Despite the transatlantic controversy over Iraq, multilateralists still retained their positive transatlantic feelings. Although the US seemed to become a less reliable partner and seemed to loose its respect for multilateral institutions, it was generally concluded that Germany could not conduct a successful foreign policy without a strong transatlantic partnership. The experience of the European reliance on US military power during the Kosovo war, as well as the conviction that the transatlantic community is still founded on common values made a continuation of the German-American relationship a prime interest for Germany in this narrative. A stronger EU is deemed important to strengthen transatlantic ties: a more united Europe would be a strong and reliable partner and ally to the US. At the same time, only a more united Europe, which is not constructed as a counterweight to US power, could and should influence American policy to bring it more in line with ideals about multilateralism in this narrative. This new, albeit still modest self-awareness was a result of the feelings of pride that came with the German participation in the NATO operations in Kosovo, Germany continued its *Westbindung* and took on the responsibilities that are naturally bestowed upon a strong member of the Western state community: Germany had finally proven to be a 'normal' country.

What is typical of all three narratives in the years 1999-2003 is the fact that after Kosovo German history played a diminished role in the foreign policy discourse. No longer was the Second World War or Auschwitz used as an 'argument' to either propose or oppose a certain role for Germany in security affairs. Although the past is clearly not forgotten, it no longer casts a large shadow over Germany's foreign policy identity. The German foreign policy elite seemed to be more at ease with their own national past and thus with their own identity.

Interestingly, the positions in the three narratives on Germany's role in Europe, in transatlantic affairs, and in security issues converge significantly over the years. Despite different legitimisations for their positions, according to all three narratives Germany should take on a leadership role in Europe to promote a more unified EU that should become a mix of supra- and international elements. In all three identities the United States is increasingly seen as being part of the out-group, as being different from Germany. And finally, in all three identities Germany's role in security affairs is 'normalised' in the sense that it is believed that Germany should participate in military operations with its Western partners for humanitarian or security reasons if such an intervention is legitimate under international law. The constraints of 'reality' lead to a pragmatic consensus on most topics and therefore more similar positions on practical foreign policy issues.

Conclusions

The underlying question of this study was whether a constructivist approach helps us to better understand German foreign and security policy since 1990. Since unification, Germany continued to resemble a 'self-chained Gulliver'. Its foreign policy remained very multilaterally orientated, the pro-European attitude (in general) was perpetuated and its willingness to remain a loyal transatlantic partner persisted. Nonetheless, by 2003 it is clear

that in particular the style of Germany's foreign policy has changed. The country apparently gave up its role as a supporter for more supranational integration in Europe, it opposed the US on a critical security issue and the country participated in countless military operations around the world. An analysis of the German debate on foreign and security policy can help to explain this discontinuation. This study shows the remarkable changes in the way German political scientists, historians and politicians that participated in this debate, defined the most appropriate role for Germany in European, transatlantic and security affairs in the years between 1990 and 2003. Although these changes were mostly 'camouflaged' by slightly altering the meaning of key concepts such as 'civilian state', 'interest', and 'responsibility', the altering effects on the way Germany's role in international affairs is legitimised is substantial. Although it is hard to prove a direct causal relation between developments in this debate and Germany's foreign policy – which was not attempted in this study – the similarities do suggest that the identities that help inform the foreign policy debate also influence a state's foreign policy. Like constructivist theory claims, collective identities offer a frame of reference, a compass, and the parameters for the foreign policy course that German academics and foreign policy analysts see as appropriate for Germany. As collective mental constructions these identities remain relatively stable, but do change as a result of 'interaction' with the (perceived) reality of international relations.
This study also indicates the importance of developments in the international environment as initiator for change in the post national, realist and multilateral foreign policy identities. Unwilling partners for further European integration, a more unilateral American foreign policy and the inability to stop genocide and wars without credible military force are all external realities that changed the three belief systems and thus the perceived appropriate German foreign policy as a reaction. Interestingly, it seems that the foreign policy identities change primarily due to an 'intra-narrative-debate' and not due to an exchange of ideas between different identities.

Given the changes in the debate over the country's foreign and security policy since 1990 and especially the recent changes, it seems likely that subtle but meaningful changes in Germany's foreign and security policy will also take place in the future. The stronger positive national self-awareness and the disappointment in the European integration process, enable a more 'normal' leadership role for Germany in Europe. The country will most probably support further integration but more in the direction of a European confederation. And when its perceived national interests are at stake, it will most likely choose to preserve its sovereignty. Despite the Iraq crisis, Germany will attempt to pursue its traditional '*sowohl-als-auch*'-policy in transatlantic relations, and maintain the primacy of NATO as the prime security organisation in Europe. But what will change is the willingness to follow the United States. A more pronounced German/European role in international security affairs might be sought. The perception of the US has deteriorated to such an extent that the strong feelings of identification with the country, a characteristic of the Federal Republic's foreign policy identity since 1949, have given way to a mere pragmatic acceptance that Germany needs the US for its national security interests. In that sense, the transatlantic *Westbindung* might remain a guiding principle for German foreign policy, but the idea that both countries are part of a common transatlantic community of values will loose its appeal. Such a readjustment of German foreign policy is also likely with regard to security and defence matters. By participating in military operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, Germany has become a 'normal' loyal ally that takes over its fair share of responsibility for peace and security in the world, according to most commentators. This policy of participating in multilateral military operations, when there is a sense that this is necessary to strengthen the Western institutions Germany belongs to, and when there is an obvious humanitarian argument for intervening

will also prevail in the future. As long as military interventions fit comfortably with the self-image of Germany as a Westerly oriented Civilian Power, Germany will participate. At the same time, the country might more and more try to 'export' its broad concept of security and its remaining scepticism towards a one-sided military 'solution' to security issues to its European and American partners. In short, Germany will become a self-confident Civilian Power in security affairs.