

National Foreign Policy Traditions and European Foreign Policy: The Case of Germany

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[The presentation at Meiji Gakuin University was similar to one given at Kobe University in February 2010 on which this transcript has been based – Please also consult the accompanying Powerpoint]

I would like to briefly sketch how I will proceed. Since we are supposed to talk about different types of foreign policy traditions and European foreign policy, I want to start by clarifying how I understand some of the concepts that were used in the setup of the program. I will then go through a brief overview of my argument in terms of answering two of the questions that are outlined in the invitation. Next, I will have a look at the foreign policy tradition of what has come to be called the Bonn Republic, that is, the Federal Republic before unification. Afterwards, there will be a brief section specifying how unification, understood as "environmental change", and foreign policy adjustment actually introduced a very different setting from which a new type of foreign policy tradition emerged, the foreign policy tradition of the so-called Berlin Republic since unification.

Clarifying concepts. I chose the term "foreign policy tradition" rather than, as is more common in the field of international relations, speaking of "foreign policy theory" or simply "foreign policy" without any additional characterization. I think the term "tradition" is quite aptly chosen, although it is a highly underspecified term in social science theory in general and in IR theory in particular.

In my view, "tradition" is probably best defined as a set of collective beliefs and foreign policy practices which reflect the historical experiences and ambitions of a particular country and result from interaction in a specific environment and with other foreign policy actors. Obviously, this is not a definition of a static phenomenon. Rather, any "foreign policy tradition" is a fluid and adjustable set of collective beliefs which responds to specific situations as they arise and change. Therefore, it is not something that you can tackle with the standard tools and theoretical concepts of the social sciences.

In dealing with foreign policy traditions in the context of national foreign policies in Europe and European external action/European foreign policy, we are faced with two different types of actors – the EU and the nation state. Modern, or as we sometimes call it Westphalian, foreign policy has largely been invented by the European nation state. Therefore, national foreign policy traditions in Europe reach back quite far in European history, and countries such as Britain, France, or Germany have very long lines of foreign policy tradition.

However, the project of European integration has significantly transformed these long-established foreign policy practices. I think this is most obvious if one looks at how diplomatic services have been changing. Adapting structurally to the way that foreign policy is conducted within the European Union, diplomats from France, Britain and Germany interact with each other on the European scene. Second, the European Union as a collective actor also interacts with other foreign policy players on the global scene.

National and EU foreign policy traditions interact. To use a term borrowed from international relations theory: they are mutually constitutive. One cannot think of national German foreign policy in a global setting without taking into account that it is taking place in environment characterized by European integration. German foreign policy both influences its environment and is influenced by it.

To continue the clarification of key concepts, I will try to make sense of the conditions and factors that shape foreign policy traditions in a rather abstract way: I want to go through a list of three structural variables and two actor-oriented variables, i.e., S1 through S3 and A1 and A2. As I go through my presentation, I will illustrate these more abstract and general variables with very specific instances of foreign policy traditions of both the European Union and Germany before and after unification.

The first structural variable (S1) is what, in realist theory, is usually called the distribution of capabilities and balance of power in the international system as a whole. Applying this variable to the European Union, one may ask how the distribution of capabilities on the global scale affects an emerging foreign policy tradition in the European Union. The European Union is a unique type of foreign policy actor. It is different from other types of foreign policy actors (e.g. nation-states) that we know; yet at the same time it is also a fairly powerful and influential actor although it does not behave as unitary state-type actors normally behave.

Another dimension of the systemic structural variable S1 is that Europe is located in an international system which works to its advantage as it renders it fairly secure. There is no immediate threat to the European Union, at least not a classical territorial threat to the EU as a whole. However, as the structures operating on the global level normally put a premium on the ability of great powers, such as the U.S., China, or Russia, to act quickly and decisively, and since such action is not a strength of the European Union, these structures also disadvantage the EU as an international actor.

The second variable that needs to be taken into account when you look into the factors shaping foreign policy traditions is the environment of a foreign policy actor (S2). Alexander Wendt uses the term "culture of anarchy" to describe different possible types of settings in which countries may conceive themselves to be, and which enable them to pursue different types of objectives and goals. For example, we might encounter a classical realist environment: a so-called "Hobbesian" world where war among state actors is possible at any time. This is a specific kind of setting that poses different incentives for action, compared to, for example, a "Kantian" setting in which a war between state actors is almost unthinkable because states perceive each other as friends. Such is the case in Europe, or at least in EU Europe, where it is almost impossible to conceive of a war between Britain and France or Germany and Luxembourg. By enabling certain actions while making other actions unthinkable and, hence, impossible, the kind of setting thus shapes the evolving foreign policy tradition.

This effect of being in a Kantian setting is furthered by institutional density, that is, whether you have a setting which is fairly densely structured by international institutions. Europe obviously is such a place with the European Union, NATO, and other institutions. After the Second World War, these institutions were set up in a different, "Lockean" kind of environment, at best, an

environment characterized by very few international institutions and by a dominance of traditional, state-based kinds of political practices.

My third structural variable (S3) is called "institutional structures". By "institutional structures" I mean the kinds of institutions that shape the particular actor. What institutional structures are there in the European Union? There is the imperative of consensus politics, of taking a unanimity view when it comes to foreign policy decision-making, at least in terms of the key decisions being taken. Furthermore, there are multiple centers of power in European foreign policy-making. Although I would argue that Brussels has become crucially important, some big players still believe that it's more significant to call Paris, London or Berlin rather than Brussels. Whenever I attend international conferences where Americans or Russians are present, I'm stunned how little Russians and Americans still understand about the proper operations of the European Union. The importance of the EU's internal structures for its foreign policy must not be underestimated.

My first actor-centered variable (A1) puts an emphasis on historical experience. The assumption is that depending on the experience that a foreign policy actor brings to the case, it will develop different foreign policy traditions. Obviously, the European Union does not have much historical experience, especially when compared to national foreign policy traditions such as the British or the French one. The European Union is a fairly nascent player when it comes to foreign policy, so in the case of the EU, variable A1 does not hold much explanatory power.

My last actor-oriented variable (A2) looks at the ambitions of the specific foreign policy actor under study. Judging from past behavior and articulations, what will the actor strive for in the future? In the case of the European Union one such ambition is its specific understanding of security. Yesterday, I gave a presentation on this issue in which I argued that in the European Union there is an observable shift from a concept of national security towards a concept of transnational security. In addition, a second ambition of the European Union is that it wants to have a say in global affairs. Anticipating my main argument that the EU influences the foreign policies of its member states, this second ambition is, in my view, key in shaping how the big three, France, Britain, and Germany, position themselves within the European context.

These five variables are the more general, theoretically-inspired conceptual argument. I have tried to concretize this argument by pointing to specific instances of EU foreign policy traditions. To summarize my key theoretical arguments, I will pick up the two questions which were outlined in the invitation to this workshop and offer my answer.

The first question was: "Is the process of Europeanization bound to affect national foreign policies to the point of convergence?" To this, I would answer that European integration in general and the EU's nascent foreign policy tradition in particular, on the one hand, and national foreign policy traditions, on the other, will shape each other, but they will not converge, at least not if by convergence we mean their eventual identity. Following the definition provided before, "traditions" adjust to changing circumstances, but they remain an expression of quite unique sets of collective beliefs and ambitions.

The second question was: "Are foreign policy traditions of member states resilient enough to constrain foreign policy directions of the EU?" Institutionally, the EU's foreign policy continues

to be on an expansionary trajectory even if the Lisbon Treaty turns out to be the "final" treaty of the European Union. Nevertheless, national foreign policy traditions will remain influential. Yet because of the recent enlargement of the EU, there are at least 27 different foreign policy traditions and the need for compromise is increasing steadily. If global pressure continues to rise both on the EU as a collective as well as on its individual member states, the resulting adjustments of foreign policy traditions will produce ever more distinct foreign policy practices at the level of the European Union and at the national level.

My expectation for the next two decades is that we will see adjustments in traditions of foreign policy practices both at the national level and at the level of the European Union.

I would suggest that we move on to the foreign policy of Germany. I will first look at the foreign policy tradition of the Bonn Republic, i.e. that part of the Federal Republic's history which is usually framed as reigning from 1949 until unification in 1990.

If one looks into the literature on Germany's foreign policy, there is a consensus about the key elements of the foreign policy tradition of the Bonn Republic. Therefore, I will go through them in a quick and straightforward manner. A first key element is an anti-militarism which puts the Bonn Republic in the same league as Japan. Although there are, undeniably, other differences between the two, anti-militarism as a result of the historical experience of two world wars can be seen as a uniting feature of Japanese and German foreign policy traditions.

The second element is commonly called "instinctive multilateralism" by many German observers. Timothy Garton Ash invented the term "attritional multilateralism", by which he meant that German diplomats were quite adept in persistently pursuing their own goals in multilateral settings, but at a very low-key level. This latter aspect is usually expressed by the concept of a "culture of restraint" ("Kultur der Zurückhaltung") which has been a major feature of how the foreign policy elite of the Federal Republic presented itself internationally until the late 1980s.

Not surprisingly, another major element is what is usually called the thorough Europeanization of Germany's foreign policy identity. Alongside France in particular, the Bonn Republic was one of those EU member states which are most entangled in the whole institutional and identity setting of the European Union.

In terms of the substance or the overarching grand strategy of the Bonn Republic, Werner Link, a German colleague of mine, has coined the phrase "Westbindung und Ostverbindungen": if one had to summarize the grand strategy of Germany it boiled down to integrating with the West, i.e. Western Europe and North America, and cooperating with the East, i.e. Russia and its satellite states. The two terms, integration and cooperation, clearly signal the asymmetry of foreign policy towards the West and the East. There was much closer coordination and, in the following, much deeper integration with Western allies and partners; however, there was "merely" interstate cooperation on a contractual basis with the East. These are three of the key elements of the Bonn Republic's foreign policy tradition.

How did this foreign policy tradition emerge? It is the result of two experiences. Pointedly, one could argue that there was, on the one hand, the need to forget the past (of the "Machtstaat"

tradition), while on the other hand, the Bonn Republic needed to get used to and to appreciate its promising future. First, forgetting the past – of the “Machtstaat” tradition - which is the tradition of a foreign policy oriented towards power politics and which was embodied in different versions by Bismarck, Wilhelm I, and Hitler - meant that this tradition was understood as having been an utter failure. This kind of foreign policy was a failure both instrumentally (i.e. in terms of achieving specific foreign policy aims and objectives) and morally. Distancing itself from this past was a major factor contributing to the exact shape of a newly emerging foreign policy tradition in the Bonn Republic.

The second element mentioned before is the project of European integration. This in itself opened the door for German reintegration into the international community and familiarized a new generation of diplomats with new cooperative practices. Summarizing, there was a past that the Bonn Republic wanted to distance itself from, and there was an opportunity structure in the context of the European Union which provided very enticing and promising incentives to establish a new foreign policy tradition.

What effects did the foreign policy tradition of the Bonn Republic yield for the project of European integration and for Germany itself? For the European Union, German foreign policy and its emerging tradition were instrumental in bringing about the very project of supranational institutions itself. Without Germany, (i.e., without that particular type of centrally-located European player) and its important cooperation with France, European integration would not have been possible. Regarding the effects of German foreign policy on the project of the European integration, building trust and establishing new cooperative practices were an additional benefit which this new foreign policy tradition yielded.

In terms of the effects for the Bonn Republic itself, regaining international respect, recognition, and status was one of the major ambitions of the Adenauer government. If one recalls how Germany was understandably and rightly looked upon in the late 1940s and early 1950s, than being accepted back in the international community was a tremendous achievement which became possible in part due to the further integration of the European Union.

What shaped the Bonn Republic's foreign policy tradition? I will apply some of the more general variables to the specific case of the Bonn Republic. Regarding S1, the international system and the distribution of power and capabilities, it is rather obvious that the Bonn Republic was in a very difficult situation. It was a dependent and a constrained ally. It was dependent because security could only be provided for by its supporting allies, and it was constrained because of the rights of the four victorious powers (“Siegermächte”), which put a brake on any free and independent movement by the Bonn Republic.

In terms of S2, the environment in which Germany was acting, it was fairly clear that during the Cold War Germany would have been the battleground of a possible third world war which would be a war conducted with nuclear weapons. Although there are some people present at this workshop that are much more knowledgeable about this issue than I am, I think what has become clear from the historical record, from the documents that became accessible after the Cold War, is that if war had broken out in Europe, it would have been much quicker in approaching a nuclear threshold than people had expected. Another environmental factor that

was shaping the Bonn Republic's foreign policy tradition is the steady rise of the country within Western institutions and the Europeanization I've been alluding to before.

The institutional structures (S3) that shaped the Bonn Republic in terms of its foreign policy are its integration into a Western-type of democracy. Obviously, as European integration proceeded, the Bonn Republic's foreign policy apparatus had to conform to what is expected of a modern Western-type democracy. Once again, the fact that institutional structures at the national and at the European level are highly intertwined is of vital importance for attributing this causal impact to the institutional structures at the European level.

I have already referred to the importance of historical experience (A1). The power politics state ("Machtstaat"), the Second World War, and the Holocaust are of significance in shaping what had developed into a unique foreign policy tradition after the war.

The national ambition (A2) which found its expression in the Bonn Republic's foreign policy was to strive towards "Gleichberechtigung" (equal status) in the international realm. This is a theme which has continuously shaped German foreign policy throughout the 40 years of the Bonn Republic, regardless of the political orientation of particular governments. Obviously, the term "Gleichberechtigung" was interpreted in different ways by different governments at different points in time. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, equal status referred primarily to Germany's immediate neighbors, so that regaining equal status vis-à-vis Belgium was a major achievement for the Germans in the early 1950s. In the 1970s and 1980s the scope of the policy of "Gleichberechtigung" widened, and Germany joined the G7 and later the G8. Nevertheless, "Gleichberechtigung" was at all times a crucial ambition of the Bonn Republic's foreign policy.

Another national ambition was that of "Einheit in Frieden und Freiheit" (unity in peace and freedom), a formula which, in a nutshell, summarizes the overarching foreign policy objectives of the Bonn Republic, namely, to try and realize unification at the same time as preserving the internal political structure of the Federal Republic. This structure was a Western-type democracy, and this had to be accepted by Germany's international partners, its neighbors to the East as well as the West.

If one takes a look at the events of 1989 and 1990, it becomes apparent that, within just one year, the Federal Republic of Germany had realized the two core foreign policy ambitions (equal status and unity in peace and freedom) which I just related to. Germany was united geographically, more secure, and it was much less dependent. Therefore, to expect that a united Germany would merely be a larger Bonn Republic was implausible from the very beginning. Unification, environmental change, and foreign policy adjustments meant a dramatic break that almost forced Germany to reinvent the foreign policy tradition of the Bonn Republic. However, many Germans did not expect a change in Germany's foreign policy, in contrast to most foreign observers who were at least expecting a reemergence of a more assertive German foreign policy. Not many were going as far as some Anglo-Saxons who predicted a Fourth Reich, but many were quite skeptical, including former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

So what did and what do the Berlin Republic (i.e. Germany after unification) and its emerging foreign policy tradition look like? This is probably easiest to understand by comparing the

emerging new tradition to the tradition of the Bonn Republic. In contrast to the anti-militarism of the old days, the Berlin Republic has become what is often called a "normal ally". The Berlin Republic may not send as many troops to Afghanistan as the British or the Americans do, yet, German soldiers are dying in Afghanistan. One of the stereotypes that Germany's allies continue to hold about the German soldiers is that they are not willing to fight. However, while the influence of the historical experience on and the long anti-militarist traditions of German foreign policy still render Germany a different actor in some respects, the Berlin Republic has come a long way, and it is rapidly becoming a normal ally.

Regarding the instinctive multilateralism I have referred to above as one characteristic of the Bonn Republic, it seems as if the multilateral orientation of the Berlin Republic is of a different, more assertive type. This could be illustrated by looking at Germany's foreign policy behavior both in the context of the European Union and in its ambition to acquire a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

The culture of restraint so characteristic of the Bonn Republic has been replaced by what former chancellor Gerhard Schröder used to call the "Selbstbewusstsein" (in the double sense of both self-confidence and self-assertiveness) of a middle power. This "Selbstbewusstsein" is a different mindset which is pushing German foreign policy today.

Moving on to the fourth characteristic of the Bonn Republic, I think that Germany today is still a fairly Europeanized state. However, my research on how German foreign policy and European integration have been interacting over the course of the last 20 years also shows a gradual de-Europeanization, or renationalization, in the way that Germany relates to the European Union. This observation is expressed in the formula "de-Europeanization by default".

Finally, in terms of the substantive goals of German foreign policy already alluded to above, "Westbindung und Ostverbindungen" have been replaced by European leadership and permanent equal status. This refers, for example, to the Berlin Republic's ambition to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In sum, the Berlin Republic's emerging foreign policy tradition is characterized by its becoming a "normal ally", an assertive multilateralism, its "Selbstbewusstsein" as a middle power, a certain "de-Europeanization by default", and its new ambitions of European leadership and permanently "equal status".

How did this foreign policy tradition of the Berlin Republic emerge? Soon after the events of 1989 and 1990, there was a situation one might call "tabula rasa". As it had achieved essentially all of its foreign policy goals, the new Berlin Republic had to reinvent its foreign policy tradition. This reinvention was shaped by two factors: the expectations held by Germany's allies, and the capability and willingness of Germany to respond to its allies' expectations and become a less exceptional, a normal player in international affairs. Last but not least, a generational change within the foreign policy elite also deserves to be mentioned, and foreign policy adjustments as well as the effects on the emerging tradition are already observable.

What effects does the emerging foreign policy tradition yield for the project of European integration and European foreign policy? Partly as a result of how the Berlin Republic positions itself within Europe, most Europeans are settling down into the EU as it is set up in the treaty of Lisbon. This is a "post-federal" EU which has said goodbye to idea cherished by Helmut Kohl and many of his generation to organize the European Union in a federal way. It is a normalizing European Union in the sense that supranational integration is no longer pushed for. At the same time, it is a union which is readjusting to new types of leadership structures such as the coordination among the three biggest members Britain, France, and Germany.

What effects does the emerging foreign policy tradition yield for the Berlin Republic itself? Today's Germany is assuming a more visible leadership role, and this could possibly provoke modern forms of anti-German balancing. There are a few signs pointing in the direction of such anti-German balancing, e.g. Italy's reaction to Germany's ambition for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, or Poland's reaction to Schröder's and Putin's gas pipeline deal. However, this last point is still rather speculative.

In conclusion, what shapes the emerging foreign policy tradition of the Berlin Republic? If one looks at the distribution of capabilities and searches for variables such as a balance of power (S1), Germany has become what Hans-Peter Schwarz has called Europe's "Zentralmacht", a centrally-located power which is influential both in decision-making processes with both its Western and Eastern partners. The situation is no longer characterized by the Iron Curtain; rather, the Berlin Republic is "encircled by friends". Therefore, what is foremost at stake today is no longer Germany's immediate security and survival – the Berlin Republic has no reason to fear its neighbors – but Germany's role in the competitive game of global affairs.

The (security) environment (S2) in which Germany is operating is a prosperous and secure Europe on the post-federal trajectory as I explained above.

As far as institutional structures (S3) are concerned, one can observe a certain institutional and mental renationalization, as already alluded to above. By institutional renationalization I mean that in fields where the European level had been more important and influential in the past, the foreign policy elites of the Berlin Republic have taken decisions in order to actually regain leverage at the national level. Mental renationalization is to be understood as a mindset that sees the nation state as a normal institution, providing an important change from the Bonn Republic's mental set-up.

The historical experience (A1) which has been shaping the emerging foreign policy tradition of the Berlin Republic is the success story of the Bonn Republic. Part of this positive historical experience is also that modern European power politics "don't hurt". After the Second World War, power politics were a taboo for they would have reminded both the Germans and their international counterparts of the hegemonic ambitions Germany used to have. However, in the course of the last decades, Germany has learned that it can stand up for and push for its national interests in the modern, European version of power politics. Such behavior, while occasionally provoking insults like Berlusconi's exclamation of the Germans being "sons of the Nazis", in general does not trigger the same worried responses as it used to.

Concerning the final variable, the national ambition which is shaping the emerging foreign policy tradition (A2), the Berlin Republic seems to already have become accustomed to a leadership role within the European Union, and it has aimed to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. This exemplifies the Berlin Republic's new self-perception of being a normal player in world politics, comparable to France and Britain.