

The new German foreign policy within the EU from reunification 1990 to 2008. Relations with Russia and the United States about highly political issues. New perspectives.



Actually the German foreign policy finds itself in a stage of transformation, of readjustment to the new world order, as the country itself. After living more than forty years under the Iron Curtain, Germany finds itself to confront a wholly new situation both at home as in the world which needs to be tackled otherwise as it used to be in the past. This implies the co-presence of contradictory tendencies within the country. Be it remembered for instance the last face off with its past and its definitive historicization with the decision to send troops abroad (*Auslandseinsätze der Bundeswehr*) in the context of NATO war missions as in Afghanistan. The break with the past antimilitarist taboo occurred during the Yugoslav wars at the beginning of the Nineties as German foreign Minister Genscher decided that it was strict duty of the international community to prevent an ethnic cleansing perpetrated against Bosnian Muslim populations that was rightly interpreted by the international community as sense of responsibility but also as a show of self assertiveness by the Germans. In this context of further relativization of the past it is now taking place a very inappropriate comparison between the National Socialist past and the historical legacy of the former GDR in a ill-conceived unified concept of totalitarianism which is exploited for political purposes by some right-winged elements (FDP) to prompt a more assertive German foreign policy.

The past and its consequences on today's Germany self-perception and the use of the military instrument

The Nazi past still lingers on in today's Germany, although in a very different way in comparison with the years before reunification in 1990. The process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or historical "coming to terms with the past" is by now accomplished, only personal memoirs are still capable of being searched in order to overcome the trauma of the war. Germany is then taking an always more assertive role in shaping today's Europe. Europe is not understood any more as it was some decades ago as an emotional substitute (*Ersatz*) for a lacking German political identity ensuing from its post war moral discredit, but as a necessary complement and reinforcement (enshrined in the article 23 of the *Grundgesetz*, the Constitution of 1949 conceived in the spirit of reconciliation with the West and its core values), in order to assure Germany's role in the world that otherwise could not by any means be assured since to compete effectively in economic and political globalisation is needed a size of which the European nation State is not anymore apt to. Although the EU is now seen by the most part of the German population as a self evidence, many people are

worried by its continuing enlargement to the east which does not seem to be over yet and above all by some lack of democracy enshrined in its political structures, for instance, the European Commission which is not elected democratically, so it does not have a direct accountability to the common citizen, (*Buergernaehe*) that the German population, living in a highly developed federal State so much cherishes, but plays all the same a prominent but undemocratic role in the implementation of EU policies, notwithstanding the recent introduction of the subsidiary principle. German foreign policy must take care of these concerns of the German population regarding the EU policies and decision making political structures. Otherwise a strong growth of social discontent, of populism and of far-winged parties is soon to be expected. Its role was and still is that of an economic giant, but now, devoid of any sense of guilt for a by now in time very far away past, it tends to stress its political importance in the shaping (*Gestaltung*) of this new Europe which is shifting more and more to the east, although it is not sure exactly where this ever continuing enlargement will ever stop. For instance Turkey's adhesion to EU will be a serious issue in the next years, also on account of Germany's negative stand on it. Germany already has a very numerous Turkish population on its territory and therefore fears another stream of people moving to Germany which would represent a kind of danger for its internal stability, as right winged forces seem to say. Furthermore, the ever going on enlargement would mean the shift of borders to the restless Middle Eastern region which is, of course, both an opportunity as also a potential threat to Germany and to all of EU. German politicians are aware of it as are American politicians who are lurking for this step of the EU hoping also for a weakening and loosening of its political and policy making structures in the short-medium term. German politicians on their side fear the Islamization of Germany and the involvement of EU in the Middle Eastern region which would imply its rapid growth to a global power that would substantially transform the former regional civil power. It should be then ready to tackle very serious issues as the radicalisation of Islam in the region which requires not only diplomatic and political means but also military ones which the EU at present almost completely lacks. And this would entail above all a EU common foreign and defence policy (ESDP) and also a EU Neighbourhood Policy, especially for the "buffer zone" States between EU and Russia (Ukraine, Belarus), which automatically means to give up or merge national powers with European ones on this very important State issue which traditionally has always been its exclusive responsibility. Germany, generally speaking, by its deeply rooted cultural tendencies, in a kind of theological thought, leans to build a strong Europe which can speak out with a single voice on the world stage. It is a "strong-minded thought" (*Gruendlichkeit*) or politically deeply cogitated consistency which can be tracked down in its cultural and political history down to the last centuries and which shuns from with difficulty reached compromises among 27 different States which are

unfortunately the hallmark of today's Europe. According to Germany's vision, Europe should develop, from an essentially economic construction to a political entity in the above mentioned sense. This means mastering very sensitive- between them intertwined issues-both at a national level as at an international level. This is true especially about the probable Turkey's adhesion to EU, which represents the real threshold of this very sensitive issue for the future of Europe and for Germany itself, given the very issues at stake as, for instance, sharing common borders with restless Middle Eastern States which adds up to the issue of mass immigration as the already very numerous Turkish community living on German soil could be joined in this eventuality by other hundreds of thousands of Turkish people who could be seen as rivals in the work place and lead to a substantial dumping in the labour market. This could also endanger the social and "racial stability" of the German population and so the ethnical and religious balance of the country that German politicians have tried meanwhile to safeguard through the introduction by the right winged parties of the concept of *Leitkultur* or culture of reference, that is German culture (*Kultur*) which should be learned in its basic elements by immigrants of non German descent, also in order to prevent a shift of a rather large part of the German population in favour of right-winged and populist parties that may take advantage of the concern of the German population about the impending threats of globalisation, as mass immigration from abroad, mass unemployment, polarisation of wealth distribution among the different social classes. So the concept of ethnicity on which Germans have relied for many years, if not centuries, should gradually disappear, substituted by an actual *Verfassungspatriottismus*¹ or constitutional patriotism which relies not on ethnicity but on deep rooted democratic values of a State subject exclusively to the rule of law. On these grounds the policy of integration of Turkish people could be more successful than it is today, giving way to a tolerant multicultural society based uniquely on constitutional values and not on ethnicity. By this very important step in the construction of a coherent and cohesive political identity, Europe and Germany itself should definitively relinquish the idea of a Christian identity and the same time in order to build a "bridge" with the Muslim world, issue of the foremost importance in the actual political world context, it should engage in a real political stage where a kind of a traditional German *machtgeschuetzte Innerlichkeit* or "power protected inwardness" that in political terms was guaranteed by the American military power which allowed for fifty years during the Cold War German economic growth, the so called "peace benefits", would also have to be definitively relinquished. So the military issue, the military projection capacity and the cohesion of political will among so many states comes up once again. The defence expenditure, the so called burden sharing, should then be considerably risen, by today's 2 or 3% of the national budget to 5 or 6% of the GDP.

¹ <http://www.zeit.de/2007/48/Habermas>

This would mean a sensible shift of the expenditure in favour of the military which would entail necessarily a further cut of welfare state with the social consequences that are easily imaginable and which are difficult to accept for the general population. In this case there is a clear gap between high politics conceived by “enlightened” politicians, for instance the former German Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer, and the opinion of the majority of the people which are generally against an admission of Turkey to the EU. There is also a cultural problem about this and that is the ill conception of the Europeans to live in a peaceful world, assumption which phenomena as the growing Islamic radicalism or other authoritarian states as Russia or China are simply showing not to be true, as it does not tally to the harsh reality of facts, that is that the military tool, that is rightly conceived by Europeans as an instrument of politics but not as the main one, does not cease to have its own importance on the international scene and especially in a crisis scenario or in a worst case scenario as for instance the Middle Eastern perennial ongoing crisis that includes the harsh confrontation with Iran’s nuclear ambitions, ill-disguised as a purely civilian use of the nuclear energy. In this case a kind of military pressure, or military strike capability, and not only diplomatic dialogue, could be undeniably of use as an effective tool of pressure on the Iranian government. The rising of military expenditure would pose also for the German government- which for many decades of the Cold War has understood itself predominantly as a *Zivilmacht* or civil power concerned only about self defence- serious question on the sustainability of today’s welfare and its further downsizing because of risen military expenditure may cause problems for its citizens and in general for the EU governments the question whether a government can set on a course to war and stand without serious political consequences the numerous casualties that would inevitably ensue from an enduring military conflict. This is for instance seen in the Afghan conflict as the German troops can only militarily respond to an attack that is waged against them, but cannot attack preventively on their own. That has, comprehensibly, very much enraged the Americans who are fighting hard against the Afghan mujahideens. So the resort to military force is one of the core issues with which Germany and all of EU within the already embedded and ever growing importance of the concept of multilateralism are confronted with in the next foreseeable years. This is a belated effect of globalisation, not only of good will of governments, inasmuch they give up a good share of their state sovereignty in order to achieve better results in the overwhelming of regional crisis. And this was understood by Germany political elites many years ago, so they gave up resolutely *almost* every hint of *Alleingang* or perilous self-initiatives as it used to be in past times. They understood that the nation State, not even Germany, a country of 82 million people and the biggest, export led, GDP in Europe, is not able anymore to master issues that have rapidly become global or to tackle and above all overwhelm regional and global crisis. This is shown, in the first place, by the troubles

Germany itself has had with the overwhelming of the emergency brought about by the annexation of the former GDR which has provoked not only a deep change in the national identity and self-perception of the country as a whole, but above all a deep economic crisis whose effects have been lasting until very recently as a sort of economic recovery seems to be in near sight. This is even more true as Germany saw itself confronted, at the beginning of the Nineties, with the collapse of the former Soviet block and the possible dire consequences that this could have above all for Germany but also for Europe in its entirety. So Germany prompted within the EU, meanwhile grown up to 15 members in 1995, for a swift enlargement to the east, encompassing most of the former Communist states. In this way it helped to prevent the spread of social unrest in these countries due to the necessary economic reforms and at the same time could come back to the ancient “position of the middle” or *Mittellage* which this time, to the contrary with the post First World war period or the Cold War period, allowed it to preserve good relations with its Western parties but also to rebuild once again its relationships with the former communist countries that had now set course for the market economy and needed therefore economic help. Fully aware that the economic reconstructions of Eastern Europe was an impossible task to tackle by its own, Germany, as mentioned before, prompted the EU to a, as rapidly as possible, enlargement to the east which finally occurred in may 2004. From that moment onwards Germany saw itself confronted with a very different Eastern European scenario. On one side it had the so called new Eastern democracies which were setting course for the market economy, on the other side, farther east, it had the ill giant of Europe, the Russian Federation which was falling into an endless chaos and was going through a path of self-destruction. Be mentioned, for instance, the severe crisis of 1998 during which Russia fell into the most awful economic meltdown of its recent history. From 1999 onwards Germany saw itself confronted with a “usual” Rapallo dilemma, that is whether to tighten its relations with the new Eastern European democracies, once called with a now outdated and vaguely threatening word *Mitteleuropa*, now within the EU or in the process of adhering to it in some years to come (Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary etc) or to tighten its economic but also its political ties with Russia and its new political rising star, the Russian President Vladimir Putin. That was a tough choice or a trade off as Eastern European countries often showed a markedly hostile attitude to Russia. The choice was inevitably for Russia as it is an incomparably richer market and politically and strategically, -also thanks to its valuable geographical position which is essential as a transit route for energy resources and logistics in general- far more important than the one of the Eastern democracies. This has put Germany in a sort of collision course with Eastern European states, especially the restless Poland, awakening this way an old fashioned fear by these last ones to be a kind of “no man’s land” or *Zwischeneuropa* between these two European giants, and above all with

the United States which are attempting to reduce as much as possible the influence of the “reborn” Russia in the post-soviet space on a global scale struggle for hegemony in the Eurasian continent where the real world strategic interests are at stake. This has brought about a serious crisis, especially in 2003 during the US led invasion of Irak, in the transatlantic relations between Germany and the United States, only recently mended by a more pragmatic and cautious German attitude to Moscow and its bad human rights record, although the United States’s behaviour toward Moscow is rather still rather defiant and also ideologically uncompromising which has brought about a dangerous feedback in their mutual relations which affect also all of the EU, splitting it in two opposite fields, as is the case for instance with the positioning of US missiles on the Polish and Czech territories, supposedly to intercept Iranian missiles, but in fact against a possible Russian nuclear threat as Moscow rightly and pointedly remarks. Germany’s role seems to be that to mediate between the two countries which have progressively different views on a vast and ever growing number of topics. Berlin, according also to its political view, wishes also to tighten its *political* ties with Moscow, besides the already existing fundamental economic ones, in order to improve the political collaboration whose importance in the future will not cease to grow, for instance, as issues such as migration, terrorism, crime, copyright infringement, protection of intellectual property, technology exchanges, space cooperation, cultural and military cooperation which would somehow reduce the EU’s dependence on the United States’ military power, as well seen during the Yugoslav wars of the Nineties, crisis management, for instance as far as the growing Islamic radicalism and terrorism in Central Asia may be a cause for concern, energy dialogue and other highly political relevant issues are concerned. So, for Germany the cooperation with Moscow is essential both at national level, above all trade and energy, as at a European level as far as the aforementioned highly political issues are concerned. This rapprochement Berlin-Moscow, including Paris, is in fact cause for some concern in Washington which fears, to some extent, the joint strength of the German technological power and the Russian geopolitical strategic importance. For Moscow, Berlin is an essential partner as economic issues are concerned but not as far as global strategies are concerned because the only partner in this respect is the United States which is important for Russia both at economic level for its WTO accession which is connected also to important political conditionalities, as at purely political level, as a promoter of the “orange revolutions” in the post-soviet space which is a sensitive standing issues between the two countries whereby Germans are perceived by Russians only as good investors who for the protection of their economic investments require a certain degree of order, lawfulness and political stability or as a non threat from the point of view of balance of forces in the post soviet space, as Germany itself has not got the means, economical and military, nor the will, to represent a threat to Russia in the “near abroad”. This

economical strength and relative political harmlessness or low profile of Germany, paradoxically, has favoured German-Russian relations. So, in the German-Russian relations, the concept of economic partner has substituted the concept of opponent or ideological enemy as it used to be till some decades ago. This, of course, implies that on German side the statements on the pitiful state of democracy in Russia occur seldom and are rather cautious in their content, at least up to some years ago, in order not to spoil the excellent climate of the business relations and of the political ones too. This has brought in the last years to some allegations of one sidedness to the former German government as far as the development of democracy in Russia is concerned, but now the German government seems to have adopted a more cautious stand on this issue. The pendulum sway alternatively between *Realpolitik* and politics of principle. That of course is exactly the opposite in comparison with the Russia-USA relations where a kind of ideological warfare seems to be going on, prompted by an ideological conservative establishment of Eastern European descent (Soros Foundation, Heritage Foundation) in the US administration and a Russian will to reach again a world power, or at least regional power, status in the region and in this case the Russian government is aware that exploiting Russian nationalism proves to be an efficient tool to reach these goals, besides the ruthless use of the energetic weapon against neighbouring countries or even the EU which is striving to reach an agreement with Russia on this issue, although Germany has already signed a bilateral agreement with Russia on energy. From this point of view it may be noticed a tendency to a certain renationalization of German foreign policies, that has brought about a special relation (*Sonderweg*) between the two countries as their economic and political interests match once again very well as it has always been in the long tradition of their bilateral relations from Catherine the Great to Bismarck, the unfortunate Nazi war against the Soviet Union, which, understandably, of course, prompted the Soviet leadership, then and also nowadays, to wish a “security belt” of States, (Ukraine, Belarus, the so called Transdnestr Republic), as an extended “buffer zone” against possible invasions from its Western borders, and then the at times difficult process of *Ostpolitik* and at last German reunification in which the Soviet Union, as it is well known, played a very important role and West Germany an important role in the rebuilding of the meanwhile falling apart Russian infrastructures. Now Germany is Russia’s main trading partner and political ally in Western Europe, although there is a certain degree of incompatibility in the medium and long term between its transatlantic relations with the USA and the very good relations with Russia. Germany’s role as Russia’s main ally in Europe has put it on collision course with Washington as they don’t share the same opinions and policies as far as the relation to Russia is concerned. German interests are mainly, but not exclusively, European ones, those ones of the USA are global. So what is Germany’s role within the EU and which are its effects on its policies towards

Russia and the process of enlargement to the East in general? It is rather an accelerating or slowing effect? Does it help the EU in coming to terms with Russian political demands and energy policies? Is EU policy towards Russia organic or different positions within it weaken it in the eyes of the Russians? How can Germany maintain a good bilateral relation with Russia without affecting the EU and the transatlantic relation? Those are the questions that must be answered soon and which are of capital importance for the future of the EU.