

10. Germany and the G7/G8

Hanns W. Maull, with Ella Kokotsis

Ella Kokotsis: Hello, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to G8 Online. My name is Dr. Ella Kokotsis and I'm the Director of Analytical Studies of the G8 Research Group. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you this morning Professor Hanns Maull from the University of Trier in Germany. Professor Maull is going to share with us some of his thoughts and insights on Germany's role in and relationship with the G8. Professor Maull, it's a pleasure to have you and thank you for coming this morning.

Hanns Maull: Thank you very much, it is my pleasure.

EK: First of all, what role does multilateralism play in Germany's foreign policy?

HM: It's one of the fundamental guidelines of German foreign policy. Multilateral diplomacy can be understood in the importance and depth of Germany's foreign policy only if one looks at the history of Germany. Multilateral orientation reflects the experience with other forms of foreign and military policy, such as the unilateral policies of the Kaiserreich of the Nazi period, when Germany acted on its own and tried to impose its power over the rest of Europe, bringing catastrophe over the rest of the world and itself. It was an existential catastrophe but also a moral catastrophe.

In that sense the reaction of Germany after the reoccupation period in 1949 was that it needs a completely different foreign policy approach. It needs a foreign policy approach that recognizes or emphasizes the fact that Germany now wants to be and will be a normal western democracy, and therefore it always wants to act with other western democracies, with others in general. This kind of foreign policy, in fact, has turned out to be extremely successful. It's difficult to think of any other foreign policy, I would argue, in the second half

of the last century, that has been more successful than German foreign policy. It's been remarkable how quickly Germany was able to rejoin the circle of established, well-respected nations, and even exercise influence. It's remarkable how quickly Germany was rebuilt from the devastations of the war and has prospered. So, a very successful foreign policy has been built on multilateralism. Therefore the conclusion has been that if it worked in the past, it will probably work again now as well as in the future.

The foreign minister who perfected this multilateral approach of German diplomacy was Hans-Dietrich Genscher. The foundations were laid from the very beginning from Chancellor Konrad Adenauer himself, who for a while acted also as foreign minister, but the specific multilateral orientation of German diplomacy as we know it now was perfected and developed fully under the very long reign of Genscher as foreign minister in the 1980s and early 1990s. It is important to understand now that when German diplomacy talks about multilateralism, it has very specific notions in mind that may be quite different from the notions of multilateralism, for instance, in the United States or France or the United Kingdom. German multilateralism essentially sees international relations as amenable to being transformed into the way politics functions within a democratic polity. Rules, laws and institutions govern. So, when Germans talk about multilateralism, they also think about international law and how it can be made into an effective, legal and political order. That's what the German version of multilateralism is about.

EK: Many would regard Germany as a great economic power. Would it be accurate to suggest that Germany is also a great civilian power?

HM: The term of civilian power implies in a way that Germany is an economic power. A

civilian power is essentially about the idea that you can civilize international relations, and civilizing international relations has important economic dimensions and even social policy dimensions. Civilized international relations from the German perspective imply a modicum of social justice. Gross inequalities should not exist. The crass underdevelopment and poverty, which we have today, should be dealt with. That is all part of this notion of civilian power. Basically, it is about transforming international relations and making international relations more civilized. I suppose when you asked this question, you were probably also thinking of the role played by military force in German foreign policy.

Of course, Germany has never been a pacifist country or a pacifist power. Even at the time of the Cold War, Germany was one of the most highly armed member states of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) (NATO) and it certainly subscribed to NATO policy of collective defence. But the Bundeswehr at that time was clearly oriented toward collective defence, which essentially meant defending Germany with and through the NATO alliance. It meant defending Germany along the German border, but nowhere else.

Now, after reunification and this change of international relations, the end of the Cold War, the complete transformation of international relations, with new threats and new problems arising, the security policy of Germany and the role of the Bundeswehr have changed. A transformation process, which is almost complete, has transformed the Bundeswehr from a collective defence army in and for Europe into an interventionist army, which can participate world-wide in principle, in military interventions of all kinds — be they peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions.

At first glance, you might think this is no longer a civilian power. This is different — it is a normal great power like France or Britain, willing to use force as necessary. In fact, I don't think that is correct. If you look more closely,

you'll find that the use of military force by Germany has continued to be contingent on two very critical requirements. The first requirement is that it never operates alone. Germany will never use its military force alone on any significant scale — and it's technically not able to do so. It will always have to do it together with others, normally within NATO or within the context of [United Nations](#) peacekeeping. The second requirement is that the use of military force has to be seen to be legitimate. Legitimacy can not only be acquired through reference to German national interests; there must be a greater cause or a moral justification for military action. Normally, that would come in the form of an United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate. Such a mandate is normally the way that legitimacy is conferred to military action. But Germany has participated also in the intervention in Kosovo, without a UNSC mandate. That was difficult, and it produced a difficult political debate in Germany, but this action was considered justified because it was seen as vital to stop another genocide in Europe. Again, there is a sort of German historical link here: Germany caused genocide in the past, so it has a responsibility never to allow genocide to happen in Europe again. That was seen as sufficient moral justification to allow German participation in that war.

EK: Would you describe Germany as being a strong regional power, particularly within the context of the European Union and NATO, or do you see Germany having more of an inclination to act as a global player within the context of the G8 process?

HM: I would like to differentiate here. Germany is a global player in economic terms. At times, it has been the first exporting nation in the world. Normally, it is number two or sometimes perhaps number three. It is one of the great exporting nations of the world, and those exports do not always go to Europe. Obviously, they go elsewhere. From that perspective, of Germany's economic interests, Germany is a global player. Look at the policy toward China,

which has intensified recently. Chinese-German relations are significant now, from the German perspective, and are an important part of German diplomacy. There have been intensive diplomatic interactions and high-level visits, but if you look at the substance of Chinese-German relations you find it's almost exclusively about German exports and contracts for large global enterprises. There you see Germany acting as a global player, but with a fairly narrow agenda.

Germany is a global player in the international economic order — not directly, but through its membership in the European Union. Important parts of the international economic agenda — the porte-feuilles of international economic relations — have been handed over to the European Commission. The European Union is in charge, for instance, of German external trade policy. That means that the European Union then represents Germany in contexts such as the [World Trade Organization](#) (WTO) or the Doha Round.

So, in that sense, in economic affairs, through the European Union Germany is also a world player or world actor. But the European Union plays this only role in the economical realm, and in this realm only imperfectly or incompletely. On the monetary side, we don't really have anyone else but the European Central Bank speaking for Europe. If you look at the political field, it is very clear and, in spite of what I just said about German-China relations, that Germany is not a global player. Its focus is on Europe and the periphery of Europe. In that sense it's clear that Germany is regional rather than a global power.

EK: If we can just shift our focus, perhaps more specifically now to the G8, can you give us some more insight into the specific role or meaning the G8 has for Germany?

HM: Germany claims it helped invent it. More precisely, it was Helmut Schmidt who is generally credited with having played a very important role in bringing the first world economic summit together. Schmidt was called

the chief of the world-class economists at that time. He took a profound interest in world economic governance, and felt there was a need for a co-ordinating mechanism among the major economic powers. That Germany was part of this is, in one sense, obvious, because at that time it was one of the principle economic powers in the world. On the other hand, yet again it conferred a modicum of acceptance that, for Germany, given its past, was not self-understood. It was appreciated that Germany would now be able and was allowed to play this kind of role by the world's most important powers. So, Germany was very important in establishing this process, and the process of G8 summitry helped German diplomacy, in the sense of Germany's commitment to principled multilateralism.

Germany played an important role, incidentally, in making the G7 into the G8. It was primarily Germany in the early 1990s that pushed for Russian membership. The idea in German diplomacy was that bringing in Russia would help support the transformation of Russia into a western, democratic, capitalist partner — an ally — or into a great important country one could co-operate with easily. This was the idea of bringing Russia into the G7 fold and turn the G7 into the G8. It happened, as we know. Russia is now a member.

But I would also say the German interest in and commitment to the G8 have been uneven. Interest was very strong at the beginning and in the early 1990s after unification, in the phase when European relations and east-west relations within Europe were in flux. Then, the interest in and the commitment to that process decreased. There was one interesting and important exception to this in 1999, at the G8 Summit in Cologne. That summit was important politically, because at that time the Kosovo war was going on and it was heading for a stalemate. Everybody was looking for political solution. German diplomacy was very active in promoting such a political solution, and Russia had to be brought into this. Therefore, the

G8 became a good context for hammering out the solution. And, indeed, that is what happened. Cologne was an important way station for settling the Kosovo dilemma. Germany used its role as host at that summit quite effectively. I think this is a general summation also about the G8 process: the host nation can exercise considerable influence, because to a certain degree it controls the agenda. Since that time, I think German interest to the G8 and commitment to the G8 have declined again somewhat. Perhaps it also it could — and should — be stronger.

EK: Professor Maull, you've given us tremendous insight on Germany's relationship and role with the G8 from a historical perspective. Can you elaborate for us, perhaps on how you see Germany's role and relationship with the G8 in the future as we look ahead to Sea Island, and next year to England, as the UK hosts, and beyond that to Russia? Can you provide us some thoughts and ideas about what that relationship might look like and what Berlin's priorities will be for the summit down the road?

HM: For Sea Island, clearly priority number one will be don't rock the boat on the U.S.-German relationship and the fallout of the crisis from 2002/03, particularly between Berlin and Washington, and personally between Gerhard Schroeder and George Bush. Relations have improved significantly, but they are still far from what they were before. German diplomacy and foreign policy have certainly understood that this is not the time to have another row with the U.S. president. Of course, with the background of the election, Bush himself is also very interested in creating the appearance of a good, steady, partner-like relationship with Germany. So I think Sea Island will not deal with any issues that are remotely controversial. It will be a peacemaking summit, ratifying that the alliance is back on track and the western world co-operation functions again.

Beyond that, from a longer-term perspective, the question of Russia looms large. I'm sure

many people are beginning to have misgivings about having brought Russia into the G8. In many ways Russia stands out; it is not yet one of the major economic players, but it is not yet a western democracy. In fact, the way the political developments are moving with recent elections, things are going in the opposite direction. It's turning more and more into a presidential authoritarian system, in which the centre fortifies, or attempts to fortify, its position. For that reason, relations between the European Union and Russia have deteriorated quite a bit recently. German-Russian relations have deteriorated not so much, but German-Russian relations recently — like relations with China — have been very much about the commercial and export interests of Germany.

Behind this, the political questions loom. One political evolution of the political system in Russia is whether it is really moving toward democracy, or whether it is moving in another direction that may, in the future, create problems for the west. The second big problem is, of course, the unresolved war in Chechnya. The way Russia deals with this conflict is just not acceptable to its partners in the G8. The fact that some years down the line we'll have a summit in Russia will bring this back into focus.

I expect and hope that there is some serious review in Germany about its relationship and the European Union's relationship and the western relationship with Russia. In the end, I think from the German side this will produce a reaffirmation of its longstanding policy objective of bringing Russia in. The policy will not end with a more confrontational approach because this is not really an option. You have to talk and to engage the leaders and powers that be in Russia, in the hope and perspective that you will eventually be able to transform Russia into a western-style democracy. This is an issue looming large.

Perhaps, that is a third consideration for the future agenda of Germany in the G8. I wish that Germany would use the G8 more forcefully and more systematically. I also wish that

Germany would perhaps consider the possibility of co-ordinating European Union positions in the G8. You have four of the G8 member states being members of the European Union. The EU aspires to a common foreign security policy. It has done more than talk about co-ordinating positions in the UNSC, so why not the G8? That would be a way of taking the G8 more seriously or promoting it as an important part of global governance.

EK: We certainly look forward to tracking Germany's ongoing relationship with the G8 and looking forward to the future. And we expect it's going to be no less interesting in the future than it has been in the past, Professor Hans Maull from Germany.

HM: Thank you very much. •

References and Recommended Reading

To come

Discussion Questions
To come.

Quiz
To come.