



AKADEMIE FÜR
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IASGP / APB Tutzing – Conference Report

Germany's New Foreign Policy, 23-25 May 2022

Eight months after the German federal election, which took place on 26 September 2021, the Academy for Civic Education in Tutzing and IASGP brought together international experts from academia, think tanks, journalism, and politics with the interested public for a three-day hybrid conference on the banks of Lake Starnberg to discuss continuities and change in Germany's foreign policy. In his welcome remarks, **Ed Turner**, Acting Chair of IASGP, underlined that the conference was an opportunity to address key questions about Germany's role in the world, reflecting on but also going beyond the “Zeitenwende” invoked by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine three months earlier.



Ed Turner. Credit: APB Tutzing/Theresa Schell

What Is the “Zeitenwende”?

The opening panel set the scene by reflecting on the very meaning of the “Zeitenwende” and the quintessentially German debate surrounding it. **Christos Katsioulis** (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Regional Office Vienna) and **Hans Kundnani** (Chatham House, London) agreed that major change in German foreign policy was rather unlikely. Not only was [German politics consensus-oriented](#), but for the past 30 years, its foreign and security policy had also been characterised by continuity thanks to the protective umbrella provided by the US. Change had been mostly incremental. Radical change, if at all, had happened either through its own initiative in close consultation with Germany’s allies or following major pressure from outside (e.g. the Kosovo intervention in 1999). If anything, Scholz’ “Zeitenwende” speech on 27 February 2022 had exposed the extent to which Germany – unlike others – had failed to notice that Russia was not receptive to *Wandel durch Handel* (‘change through trade’) after all, as evidenced by its conduct in Syria, the annexation of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, and the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal. Against this background, Germany would find it difficult to respond in an assertive, strategic manner to Russia’s move away from a [cooperative security order in Europe](#). At this point, it would be difficult to assess the long-term effects of higher defence spending on Germany’s military capabilities and weapons delivery to Ukraine. What had certainly emerged, however, was a self-centred, morally charged debate around the difficult trade-offs between [the core elements of Germany’s post-war foreign policy consensus](#): integration with the West (“never alone”), reconciliation with Russia (“never again war”), and a prioritisation of human rights and democratic values (“never again Auschwitz”). These pillars, Katsioulis emphasised, had already begun to totter because of Germany’s energy dependence on Russia (viz.: Nord Stream 2), its “business first” policy, and intra-European rifts uncovered during the Trump presidency. This had resulted in a loss of trust in Germany’s willingness to act in the interest of its partners and forge consensus on the one hand and wariness towards German leadership, with memories of the Euro crisis still fresh, on the other hand. Germany’s economic dependence on and political naivety towards China, Kundnani added, replicated this dynamic in East Asia, and on an even higher level. To win back trust and contribute to the realisation of a “security union”, Germany would need to fundamentally reform its economic model – no doubt a painful process. The Greens, led by a younger generation of politicians, would be in a good position to meet this challenge because of their open communication style and more hawkish approach to both Russia and China.



Christos Katsioulis and Hans Kundnani. Credit: APB Tutzing/Theresa Schell

The second panel of the day asked if the “Feminist Foreign Policy” (*Feministische Außenpolitik*, FAP) laid out in [the new coalition treaty](#) and promoted by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock signalled a paradigm change in Germany’s foreign relations. **Marieke Fröhlich** (Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences, Kleve) explained that FAP has a long history, which stretches from the 1915 Women’s Peace Congress in The Hague to the 1949 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN World Conferences on Women’s Rights 1975-1995, and the UN Millennium/Sustainable Development Goals since 2000. In 2014, Sweden was the first country to declare a FAP on the national level. In essence, FAP puts decision-making in international politics (including development, climate protection, and trade) in the service of [eradicating structural power imbalances](#) on all levels: rights, work, resources, access, and participation. To achieve its aim – a positive feminist peace that is more than the absence of violence – it prioritises human security over state security, centres marginalised people, collaborates closely with civil society, and takes an intersectional perspective that is sensitive to how different forms of discrimination intersect across the categories sex, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, race, class, education, age, etc. Fröhlich highlighted the particular significance of gender equality: research has shown that strengthening the position of women and girls in society was an [important factor in achieving and retaining peace](#). The international disregard for Afghani women’s appeals for help, the use of sexualised violence as a weapon of war in Ukraine, and the rollback of reproductive rights in the US would lend further evidence to this. Questions from the audience revealed scepticism towards FAP’s potential for innovation and

change. Is it helpful, for example, to view any increase in defence spending as a “militarisation” that [obstructs sustainable conflict solutions](#)?

Facing the ‘law of the jungle’ together?

The second conference day – exactly three months after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – opened with a talk on French-German relations by **Hélène Miard-Delacroix** (University Paris-Sorbonne). Similar to Christos Katsioulis and Hans Kundnani, Miard-Delacroix did not identify a major break with the main pillars of Germany’s foreign policy: multilateralism, the transatlantic partnership, and engagement for and with Europe. She emphasised that Germany, as a “civilian power”, had combined a value-based foreign policy with interest-driven “business first” politics. In light of Brexit and populist challengers at home and abroad, the Franco-German alliance with its well-developed consultation mechanisms had become even more important and could be a source of continuity in Germany’s Europe policy, facilitated by Germany abandoning its *Wandel durch Handel* policy towards Russia. Disagreements, however, remained in relation to energy policy, finances, and defence, and needed to be tackled actively, not least because in Germany, unlike in France, foreign policy is a topic of domestic debate. The discussion highlighted the fact that it is not only Germany that is dependent on Russian energy supplies.

In his reflections on US-German relations, **Christoph von Marschall** (Der Tagesspiegel, Berlin) observed a [divergence between appearance and reality](#). A new German foreign policy was necessary and the subject of much debate, but there had been little change on the ground so far. After years of near standstill under Chancellor Angela Merkel, the new left-of-centre coalition in Berlin was under pressure to deal proactively with the war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, US foreign policy under President Joe Biden – as expected – had changed more in style than in substance, despite the US’ return to multilateralism. There was a risk of downplaying major conflicts in the area of security and trade in the name of branding the Trump years as an aberration and idealising the Obama presidency. Addressing these conflicts in a timely manner would be difficult because of Biden’s waning support at home in the run up to the mid-term elections in November 2022 and the post-pandemic economic crisis marked by record inflation and petrol prices that directed attention away from Ukraine. Russia’s war in Ukraine and the US’ shift towards the Indo-Pacific, von Marschall said, also put a spotlight on the close interaction between economic and security policy. Given that Germany’s export-focused

model depends on safe global shipping routes within a rules-based international order, it would need to realise that China is not primarily an economic, but a geopolitical challenge. Together with its allies in Europe and the US, Germany wields a lot more soft and – willingness provided – hard power than it tends to admit. In a more conflictual, [“jungle-like” world](#), [“Scholzing around”](#) would not be an option nor necessary given the broad public support for a more assertive foreign policy in consultation with the US, at least among West Germans.



Christoph von Marschall. Credit: APB Tutzing/Theresa Schell

Turning to this side of the pond, **Nicolai von Ondarza** (German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin) said that the war in Ukraine had highlighted the UK’s role as an essential actor in the European security architecture, with NATO and the [G7](#) serving as important venues for coordination outside of EU membership. With the completion of the Brexit process, German-UK relations had entered a path towards normalisation, but were overall less central than before, both politically and economically. This was also reflected in [the Integrated Review](#), the UK’s foreign and security policy strategy published in March 2021, which makes clear that there is no interest in a structured relationship with the European Union, but refers to Germany as an “essential ally”, especially on questions of defence, climate change, and the Indo-Pacific. The UK, von Ondarza said, had welcomed Scholz’ “Zeitenwende” and were not wary of a “German Europe”, although it had practical questions about Germany’s

ability to make the rhetoric a reality, for instance in re-equipping Germany's armed forces. The German coalition treaty, in turn, envisages a "close bilateral cooperation" with the UK, but makes clear that Germany's loyalty lies with the EU. Boris Johnson's flirtation with a trade war between the UK and the EU should he break the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#) risked allies losing trust in the UK and could cause serious damage to UK-German relations, even if all parties are aware of the intricacy of the problem.

Elephants and Sleeping Giants

Margarete Klein (German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin) spoke about Russia's propaganda strategy as an element of destabilising and manipulating "[sharp power](#)" to achieve its war aims: 'russifying' and de-militarising Ukraine. This strategy, she explained, builds on two key narratives that the Russian leadership promotes, both at home and abroad, to justify its invasion of Ukraine. The first is a narrative of "de-Nazification", which also conjures Germany's ghosts of the past. "De-Nazification" in response to an alleged genocide of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, Klein said, was code for a "de-Ukrainisation", i.e. the eradication of Ukraine's national identity. The second key narrative is that Ukrainian membership in NATO, even security guarantees for Ukraine, pose an existential threat to Russia. The post-Cold War European security order, according to Russia, had exploited Russia's military and strategic weakness in the 1990s; it was now time to reclaim Russia's great power status within a multipolar world and cement its hegemonic role in the post-Soviet space. This use of sharp power combined with a [militarisation of Russian foreign policy](#) and uses of soft power, e.g. through mercenaries in Libya, the Central African Republic, and Mali. President Putin, Klein explained, presented "the West" as both dangerous and weak to persuade the Russian population that a (temporary) loss in living standards due to sanctions was an acceptable price to pay for increasing Russian power in the long-term. Support was more pronounced among the older than the younger generation, however. Still, Klein was sceptical of major change happening in Russia any time soon, given that oppositional forces had been silenced and civil society weakened even further, not least through a co-optation of the media. The "System Putin" would remain in place even if Putin left the political stage. That Germany had had to abandon its *Wandel durch Handel* policy towards Russia did not mean that the European security order would now be directed *against* Russia, but rather, in the short to medium term, function *without* Russia and protect Europe *from* Russia.

Vladimír Handl (Institute of International Relations, Prague) and **András Hettyey** (University of Public Service, Budapest) discussed Germany's relations to East Central Europe with a focus on the (very heterogeneous) Visegrád group: the [Czech Republic](#), Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. **Handl** identified the changing international environment and domestic issues in central European states as the two key factors shaping Germany's relations to the group. The euphoric mood of the early 1990s and collective optimism about creating a world led by liberal democracies had gradually given way to the realisation that the "jungle" had never really cleared. If the EU was [the only vegetarian in a world full of carnivores](#), as German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel had put it in 2018, then Brexit had turned it into a vegan that had to be careful not to be gobbled up. Domestically, states in Central and Eastern Europe were still struggling with the long-term effects of "downloading" democracy and market liberalism, as recent populist and anti-institutional movements had shown. In the [Czech Republic](#), the return of Slovakian-born Andrej Babiš as Prime Minister or President was a possibility. Especially Poland was disappointed, Handl said, that Chancellor Scholz' "Zeitenwende" had turned out to be an inward-looking move rather than an assertion of true leadership and a believable distancing from the Putin regime. **Hettyey** explained German-Hungarian relations with the help of [role theory](#): Germany had abandoned its value-based foreign policy towards Hungary and prioritised trade relations instead; Hungary would repay its biggest trade and investment partner with stability and reliability – a win-win-situation. However, with Germany being forced to abandon its *Wandel durch Handel* policy towards Russia, resulting in less common ground, and Poland – in contrast to Hungary – evading punishment for its violations of the rule of law by becoming an indispensable partner in the EU's response to Russia, Hungary was likely to become more isolated in the future. Still, EU membership remained an economic and political jackpot for Hungary, regardless of Viktor Orbán's provocative rhetoric, so it would show no inclination to leave the bloc.

The last panel of the day moved the focus towards Germany's relations with China and the Indo-Pacific. **Gert Hilgers** (University of Warwick) identified a lack of knowledge ("ignorance") and trust as the drivers of [Germany's relation to China](#). Since the first red-green coalition under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 1998, China had become increasingly important for the German government as reflected in the successive coalition treaties, but remained a marginal topic overall, despite – or because – of Germany's dependence on both exports to (automobile industry) and imports from (rare earths) China. Under Schröder and Angela Merkel, German-China relations had been ostensibly stable based on a *Wandel durch*

Handel policy, at least until the mid-2010s. As with Russia, however, this strategy had failed. In the post-Merkel era and in light of the war in Ukraine, pressure from both domestic (party members and the media) and international (EU and US) actors was mounting to develop a [coherent strategy](#) that decreases economic dependence in the long term and understands how to interact with an increasingly powerful China as a partner, competitor, and rival in the Indo-Pacific region. **Tereza Novotná** (Free University Berlin/Institute for European Policy, Prague) noted that the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” was relatively new in the European context: [French President Emmanuel Macron](#) had coined the term in 2018 in a speech he had given at the Garden Island military base in Sydney, Australia. Since then, [France](#) (2022) and the [US](#) (2022) had published dedicated strategies for the Indo-Pacific, while [Germany](#) (2020) and the [Netherlands](#) (2020) presented policy guidelines for this region. In September 2021, the European Council released the EU’s own “[Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#)”. Novotná emphasised that these documents reveal different approaches and priorities: from countering China’s influence (US) to serving their overseas population (France), and forging new relations with regional countries and push economic growth based on shared values (EU, Netherlands and Germany).



Tereza Novotná. Credit: APB Tutzing/Theresa Schell

The second conference day ended with an “Akademiegespräch am See”: **Ulrich Lechte** (Regensburg), spokesperson for foreign affairs for the FDP faction in the *Bundestag*, attested Germany nativity towards Russia since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Like many of the international partners he had spoken to, Lechte welcomed the awakening of the “sleeping giant” following Russia’s (unexpected) invasion of Ukraine. He expressed his hope that Germany would provide leadership in designing a post-war security order, but much would depend on the SPD. He was particularly concerned about famine in Africa, especially Niger and Mali with a total population of more than 40 million people, due to rising wheat prices; large-scale northward migration movements would be the inevitable consequence. Overall, he advocated for more European self-sufficiency vis-à-vis the US, Russia, and China in all areas, including defence, energy, and healthcare.



Ulrich Lechte. Credit: APB Tutzing/Theresa Schell

Do not ask what the EU and NATO can do for you...

The conference concluded with a morning session on Germany’s future role in EU and NATO. For former Ambassador **Eckhard Lübke** (German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin), the Russian invasion of Ukraine was indeed a “*Zeitenwende*” for German security policy within a European context and [in partnership with France](#). Almost

overnight, he said, the “shock” of war had destroyed many of the beliefs held dear by people in the Berlin bubble. This included the belief that its neighbours feared German leadership and therefore disapproved of Germany reaching NATO’s 2% defence spending goal – a welcome excuse to continue its freeriding strategy. Germany would now need to ramp up its military security to make a fair, sustainable contribution towards capacity building in the EU and respond adequately to Russian aggression, including through weapon delivery to Ukraine. This would require new ways of thinking against the background of Germany’s (historically justified) culture of military restraint, a much bigger budget, and procurement decisions. **Aylin Matlé** (German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), Berlin) stressed that in the aftermath of 24 February, defence cooperation in NATO had replaced the focus on deterrence and taken priority over other security concerns, e.g. combating terrorism. The EU and Germany in particular would now be expected to [fulfil the promises](#) they had previously made to NATO and further strengthen their commitment in a [“permanently unpeaceful” world](#). The special fund of €100 billion for the *Bundeswehr* would not actually lead to a military build-up (*Aufrüstung*) but at most provide proper equipment (*Ausrüstung*) given a massive backlog of investment. This time, unlike in 2014, Matlé said, Germany would need to deliver on its promises. The precondition for this would be a national security strategy (unlikely to be ready in 2022) and a new strategic culture that the German population could identify with – an ‘evolution’ of rather than a ‘revolution’ in German security and defence traditions.



Eckhard Lübke (left) and *Aylin Matlé* (right). Credit: APB Tutzing/Theresa Schell

Conclusions

It was valuable to bring together an international audience from different sectors in Tutzing, and a welcome departure both from never-ending Zoom meetings, and indeed from standard academic discussion formats. Conversations in the margins of conference sessions, going late into the evening, were of real value, and we hope that such events can be repeated in the future, and can help build bridges between academics with a focus on German politics, wherever in the world they are based, and interested practitioners and the wider public. We were grateful to the Academy in Tutzing for its exemplary organisation, and to all the speakers and attendees for their excellent contributions to the event.

This report was written by Dr Josefin Graef, Independent Researcher and Co-Convener German Politics Specialist Group of the Political Studies Association.