German Foreign Policy and the Discourse of ‘Normalcy’

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Paper presented at the
63rd Political Studies Association Annual International Conference
25 – 27 March 2013
Cardiff

German foreign policy can fruitfully be analysed through the lens of a modified two-level framework which identifies three interdependent drivers behind government decision-making: the expectations of Germany’s international partners, domestic constraints and the national role conceptions of decision-makers. In recent years, the configuration of these three drivers has witnessed a two-fold change. First, there has been a nascent shift towards the role conception of Germany as a ‘normal ally’. Second, the domestic context of German foreign policy has become more politicised and contentious. In consequence, Germany’s current foreign policy tends to attach relatively less weight to the expectations of its allies, to be more driven by domestic politics – and to be altogether less predictable. The widely criticised approaches of the Merkel government to the Eurozone crisis and to the NATO mission in Libya, in turn, accord to this pattern and stand for the new ‘normalcy’ in German foreign policy.

Introduction: German Foreign Policy in Crisis

As far as its reputation is concerned, 2011 was hardly a good year for German foreign policy. Seldom has this policy been as roundly criticised. This is true, above all, for the two by far most salient issues on the Merkel government’s foreign policy agenda in 2011: its handling of the Eurozone crisis which can be traced back to 2009; and its decision to abstain in the UN Security Council vote on Resolution 1973, which imposed a no-fly zone over Libya. Indeed, Germany’s stance on these two issues has been seen to signify “the slow-motion implosion of German foreign policy.”

As for the Eurozone crisis, the main line of criticism against the Merkel government is that it failed to meet the expectations of its European partners to accept a leadership role in solving the crisis. Rather than to behave as a “responsible hegemon” and to make strong, decisive and timely commitments to do all it takes to rescue the single currency, the German response

1 K.D. Frankenberger and H. Maull, “Gimme a Break”: In Foreign Policy Germany Takes Time Out From a Complex World, Deutsche-Aussenpolitik.de, Foreign Policy in Focus No. 494, March 24, 2011.
was decried as “too little and too late”. Germany’s reluctance to act in line with its structural economic power and to throw its weight behind the inevitable aid packages for Greece has been held responsible for widening and prolonging the crisis and for increasing the risks and costs of managing it. The Merkel government’s approach was thus summarised as “folly in many senses of the term”.

More specifically, Germany has been accused in the crisis of succumbing to unilateralist temptations and of selfishly pursuing narrow, introspective and myopic national interests. Breaking with Germany’s multilateral inclinations and its tradition of merging its national with the European interest, the Merkel government was portrayed as “hiding under the warm bedcovers of German self-interest”. The largest German opposition party, the Social Democrats, for its part, blamed the government for “denying a leadership role” in the crisis, for “focusing its considerations on national sensitivities” and for pursuing “petty, national egoistic advantages”.

As for Libya, the attacks on Germany’s policy of abstention in the Security Council were hardly less scathing. The former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer was only the most outspoken of many voices in the German debate, when he criticised the government as a “scandalous mistake” which he ranked as “possibly the biggest foreign policy debacle since the founding of the Federal Republic”. The main critique was that Berlin’s Libya policy singularly failed to live up to the expectations of Germany’s most important allies, thereby damaged Germany’s reputation as a trustworthy member of the Western alliance and risked isolating the country from its partners. In particular, the German abstention in the Security Council was seen to revive “fears of Germany reverting to a semi-neutral, stay-at-home strategy that could undermine the alliance”. Indeed, the US, Britain and France made little secret of their frustration with Germany’s failure to offer support, and Timothy Garton Ash went so far as to liken the Merkel government’s position to a “stab in the back” of Germany’s allies.

Along these lines, the Social Democrats – like the Greens – ultimately joined in the critique of the government after they had initially dithered on the issue. Specifically, the opposition

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parties blamed the government for its “political isolation within the European Union”\textsuperscript{12}, for unnecessarily dropping German support for the UN\textsuperscript{13} and for provoking “a disastrous discussion about the reliability of Germany as partner”\textsuperscript{14} to its Western allies. Somewhat ironically, the only parliamentary support for the conservative-liberal government came from the Left Party, which congratulated foreign minister Westerwelle for his “very prudent and very consequent”\textsuperscript{15} decision to abstain in the Security Council.

It is thus safe to conclude that the Merkel government’s handling of the Libya issue “led to a public relations meltdown abroad and at home”\textsuperscript{16}. Very much like its policy on the Eurozone crisis, the government’s unilateral decision not to support Resolution 1973 appeared to reveal “a changed Germany, one of sharp elbows, shallow loyalties and short-sighted reckoning”\textsuperscript{17}. Speaking to the deep irritation with Berlin’s approach to the Eurozone crisis and Libya, the two issues have even been quoted as evidence for a “new, non-aligned” and “independent ‘neo-mercantilist’” German foreign policy which “seems to think that [Germany] could become a larger version of Switzerland”.\textsuperscript{18} It is difficult to imagine that the reputation of German foreign policy can sink any lower than this.

However, the policies of the Merkel government on the eurocrisis and on Libya are indicative of a more general shift in Germany’s post-unification foreign policy. The hallmark of this shift is that today’s German foreign policy is altogether less driven than in previous times by an imperative to meet the expectations of Germany’s international partners and more susceptible to the influences and vagaries of domestic politics. In consequence, German foreign policy has more than anything become less predictable – it is precisely the “unpredictability and policy pirouettes”\textsuperscript{19} of the Merkel government which have been at the core of current irritations with Germany’s role on the international stage.

The paper will argue that the apparent shift in German foreign policy can be accounted for by the evolution of decision-makers’ role conceptions for Germany in the international arena and by changes in the domestic context of German foreign policy. For one, German governments increasingly see Germany’s international role as that of a ‘normal country’ which makes them attach less weight to answering international expectations and leaves them more predisposed towards considering domestic political incentives. For another, the changed role conceptions

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\textsuperscript{13} G. Erler, \textit{Deutscher Bundestag}, Plenarprotokoll 17/100, March 25, 2011, p.11486.
\textsuperscript{15} J. van Aken, \textit{Deutscher Bundestag}, Plenarprotokoll 17/97, March 18, 2011, pp.11145-11146.
\textsuperscript{17} The Economist, ‘The Unadventurous Eagle’, May 14, 2011.
of decision-makers meet with a structurally more difficult and constraining domestic context of German foreign policy. Specifically, the policies of the Merkel government in the Eurozone crisis and on Libya can be understood in terms of the interplay between long-term changes in the role conceptions of German governments and specific domestic preoccupations of the conservative-liberal coalition.

In order to develop this argument, the following section will introduce an analytical framework which identifies three key drivers of German foreign policy: international expectations, the role conceptions of decision-makers and domestic politics. The paper will then sketch the new role conceptions of German decision-makers and the changed parameters of the domestic context of German foreign policy. Finally, the paper will come back to Germany’s policy on the Eurozone crisis and Libya.

International Expectations, National Role Conceptions and Domestic Constraints

Starting out from the metaphor of two-level games,20 (German) foreign policy is conducted between the poles of international and domestic demands. Decision-makers will always have an eye on both sets of incentives, and their primary strategic task is to navigate between them and to devise policies which do not openly contradict either of the two. Depending on the specific two-level environment, the relative impact of international and domestic demands on the foreign policy choices of German governments can be expected to vary.

Chief among the international-level incentives for German foreign policy has traditionally been to try to live up to the expectations of Germany’s (Western) partners, or at a minimum to manage and not to frustrate such expectations. The international priority of successive German governments since World War II has precisely been with establishing Germany as a reliable, respected and influential bilateral and multilateral partner to its allies. The transatlantic alliance and European integration, in particular, stand out as the twin pillars of the Federal Republic’s raison d’État.21 After unification, German foreign policy endeavoured to leave no doubt about Germany’s steadfast commitment to the West, not the least in order to allay suspicions among its partners regarding a possible German Sonderweg. German governments have thus put a premium on showing that the united Germany could be trusted to fulfil the obligations of alliance solidarity and to share the burden of transatlantic and European cooperation. Specifically, the two most forceful and demanding expectations of

Germany’s partners in the post-Cold War era have been that Germany pulls its weight in international military missions and remains a benign and leading force in the unification of Europe.²²

On the domestic level, decision-makers have to balance their international incentives against the expected repercussions of foreign policy choices on their electoral prospects. The most fundamental domestic politics concern of governments in two-level contexts is with remaining in office, and they will take care to avoid foreign policies which appear harmful in this respect. Most notably, foreign policy decision-making has to take into account the preferences and sensitivities of domestic actors who have the institutional means to threaten governments with costly sanctions and ultimately to remove them from office. In parliamentary democracies, these actors are the majority in parliament and the general public.²³ For the domestic context of German foreign policy, special emphasis needs thus to be put on the patterns of coalition politics within the wider dynamics of government-opposition dynamics in the Bundestag.²⁴ German public opinion, moreover, has tended to reflect a foreign policy culture that emphasises the country’s reflexive commitment to multilateral cooperation and is deeply sceptical of the use of military force in international affairs.²⁵

Reconciling the external and internal demands on its foreign policy has long been identified as a difficult but crucial task for post-unification Germany, specifically.²⁶ The ways in which German governments attend to this task and how responsive they will likely be to different international and domestic expectations, in turn, can be expected to be circumscribed by the national role conceptions they hold. These national role concepts of foreign policy decision-makers refer to their “beliefs or images about the identity of the state”²⁷ and to their “own conception of their nation’s role in a region or in the international system as a whole”.²⁸

reflect domestic norms and preferences about a country’s foreign policy on the one hand and international expectations towards this foreign policy on the other hand. Decision-makers thus reinforce and refine their national role conceptions in the process of interacting with international and domestic demands on their foreign policies.\footnote{For a recent overview of key concepts in role theory see S. Harnisch, ‘Role Theory. Operationalization of Key Concepts’, in S. Harnisch, C. Frank and H.W. Maull (eds),\textit{ Role Theory in International Relations. Approaches and Analyses} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp.7-15.}

Insofar as they are conceived of as explanatory variables in the analysis of foreign policy, moreover, national role conceptions delineate the range of foreign policy choices decision-makers consider appropriate and suitable for the country they represent. They set limits on which foreign policy decisions policymakers regard as feasible and they therefore allow drawing conclusions about the broad direction of a country’s foreign policy.\footnote{Holsti, ‘National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy’, pp.236-247; N.B. Wish, ‘Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions’, International Studies Quarterly 24/4 (1980), pp.532-535.} In terms of the two-level framework, national role conceptions can be seen to mediate the response of decision-makers to the international and domestic incentives they face. In other words, they act as filters through which decision-makers perceive, interpret and relate to international expectations and domestic constraints. Specifically, national role conceptions should influence the weight decision-makers attach to international and domestic expectations; affect their view on which demands on their foreign policy are or are not legitimate; and shape the standards by which they decide whether it is appropriate for them to disappoint international expectations and to give priority to domestic concerns should the two come into conflict.

Figure 1: Drivers of German Foreign Policy

[Diagram showing the relationship between International Expectations, National Role Conceptions, and Domestic Constraints]

In summary, the paper contends that German foreign policy can fruitfully be analysed through the lens of a modified two-level framework which identifies three interdependent drivers behind foreign policy decision-making (see figure 1): the expectations of Germany’s international partners, most notably its Western allies; domestic constraints, including...
coalition politics, party competition and public opinion; and the national role conceptions of governments which are themselves shaped by the interaction between international and domestic expectations but which, at the same time, mediate foreign policy choices in response to these expectations on the two levels.\footnote{It is important to note the potential interplay between international-level expectations towards Germany and domestic-level constraints on German foreign policy. From the top down, international requests on Germany may either mobilise or mitigate domestic constraints on decision-makers. From the bottom up, an awareness of the domestic constraints on German foreign policy may moderate the demands placed on Germany by its international partners.} Depending on the specific configuration of the relationship between these three drivers, German foreign policy will be shaped more by international expectations or domestic constraints.

The National Role Conception of German Governments: Towards a ‘Normal Ally’

Since unification, Germany’s traditional role conception as a “civilian power”\footnote{See S. Harnisch and H.W. Maull (eds), Germany as a Civilian Power? The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).} in international affairs has gradually worn off. Although it has so far not been replaced by a fully spelled out alternative, core elements of Germany’s role as a civilian power have increasingly lost their prescriptive power on foreign policy decision-makers. This has often been discussed in the context of Germany’s attitude towards the use of military force,\footnote{See H.W. Maull, ‘Germany and the Use of Force: Still a “Civilian Power”?’, Survival 42/2 (2000), pp.56-80; A. Hyde-Price, ‘Germany and the Kosovo War: Still a Civilian Power?’, in D. Webber (ed), New Europe, New Germany, Old Foreign Policy? (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp.19-34.} but it also applies for the near-absolute priority German governments have habitually placed on establishing themselves as a reliable partner of the Western alliance and for Germany’s reflexive multilateralism, in particular its normative commitment to European integration. While the high precedence of alliance solidarity and European unification in defining the German national interest have been constitutive parts of Germany’s role as a civilian power, they have in recent years moved down the list of priorities of German governments.\footnote{H.W. Maull, ‘Deutsche Außenpolitik: Orientierungslos’, Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft 21/1 (2011), pp.100-103, 113-115.}

The apparent erosion of Germany’s established role concept can be seen in terms of a nascent shift towards a new national role conception of post-unification Germany as a “‘normal’ ally”\footnote{G. Schröder, ‘Deutsche Sicherheitspolitik an der Schwelle des 21. Jahrhunderts’, Speech at the 35th Munich Security Conference, February 6, 1999, Bulletin der Bundesregierung, Nr. 8 (Bonn: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 1999), p.91.} or “normal country.”\footnote{F. Müntefering, Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 15/4, October 29, 2002, p.74.} The implicit template for this conception has generally been the foreign policy practices of other Western democracies in a comparable geopolitical situation,
most notably the United Kingdom and France. The rise of the concept was first discernible after the red-green coalition under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder took office in 1998. Significantly, the Schröder government was Germany’s first truly post-unification government bringing into power a new generation of leaders which lacked their predecessors’ direct experience with World War II and which were less preoccupied with the historical lessons the Federal Republic had drawn from the Hitler regime. While the self-conception as a normal ally does not imply as clearly defined expectations about German foreign policy as the more circumscribed role as a civilian power used to do, it still suggests three closely related patterns in the foreign policy orientations of decision-makers. These patterns provide broad orientations for how German foreign policy will play out in the radically different post-Cold War environment, which has significantly enhanced the international leeway of German foreign policy and which has made the shift towards the role conception of a normal ally structurally feasible in the first place.

First, the most fundamental element of the changed national role conception of German foreign policy decision-makers consists of their heightened sense of self-confidence. Indeed, the notion of a self-confident foreign policy has become a key frame in the German government discourse on foreign affairs since the days of the red-green coalition. German foreign policy would be guided, in the words of Gerhard Schröder, by “the self-confidence of a grown-up nation, which has to feel neither superior nor inferior to anyone [...]”41. If anything, the recurrent references to Germany’s (newfound) self-confidence were to emphasise that post-unification Germany has emancipated itself from its Western allies and should be expected to conduct an independent foreign policy. Chancellor Schröder, characteristically, left no doubt that “the existential questions of the German nation will be decided in Berlin and nowhere else”42.

Second, the increased self-confidence of German governments feeds into a role conception which considers it appropriate to conduct German foreign policy in the name of explicitly

38 Ibid, pp.52-53.
stated and narrowly defined national interests.\(^{43}\) As befits “a normal country in Europe”, German foreign policy is to “self-confidently defend Germany’s interests”\(^{44}\) – “just like others do as well”\(^{45}\). While this is not to say that the role conception of a civilian power did not involve the pursuit of German interests,\(^{46}\) the concept of a normal ally places altogether less emphasis on defining these interests in terms of a normative attachment to multilateral principles. Rather, it suggests a more assertive and exclusive view of Germany’s national interests and a greater readiness to pursue these interests unilaterally. The role concept of a normal country thus supports a less reflexive, more selective, more pragmatic and more instrumental German approach to multilateral cooperation.\(^{47}\)

Third, the self-conception as a normal ally reduces the inhibitions of decision-makers against disappointing the expectations of Germany’s partners. It leaves German governments more inclined to weigh off the demands of alliance solidarity against more specific and short-term interests. On the one hand, the role concept acknowledges that the era in which Germany’s partners expected nothing more from it than “a kind of ‘secondary support measures’” to their efforts at promoting international security and stability is “irretrievably over”.\(^{48}\) On the other hand, it implies that decision-makers increasingly reserve the right to decide on a case-by-case basis whether and how to follow up on specific requests of their international partners – and to stand against such requests if the German national interest so dictates. The view clearly is – as the former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer has put it – that “allies are not satellites”\(^{49}\).

The emerging national role conception of Germany as a normal country thus fosters a foreign policy that is increasingly self-confident in pursuing narrowly defined national interests and in employing these interests as explicit benchmarks for its multilateral engagement and its response to international requests for alliance solidarity. In terms of the modified two-level framework (see figure 1), this role conception works to challenge the pre-eminence which the expectations of Germany’s Western partners have traditionally enjoyed in German foreign policy. In contrast, it allows decision-makers to give more room to the intricacies of domestic

\(^{43}\) On the problems with defining the German national interest see A. Pradetto, ‘Ganz und gar nicht ohne Interessen: Deutschland formuliert nicht nur klare Ziele. Es setzt sie auch durch’, Internationale Politik, 1/2006, pp.114-123.

\(^{44}\) F. Müntefering, Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll 15/4, October 29, 2002, p.74.


\(^{48}\) G. Schröder, Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll, 14/192, October 11, 2001, p. 18682.

politics. This domestic context of German foreign policy, in turn, has generally become more demanding.

The Domestic Politics of German Foreign Policy

The most important structural change in the domestic politics of Germany’s post-unification foreign policy is that foreign affairs have become more likely to be politicised and contested in the domestic arena. To be sure, the ‘Bonn Republic’ has also seen intense domestic conflict over some of the most significant turning points in its foreign policy including Adenauer’s policy of Western integration, German rearmament, Brandt’s new Eastern policy and NATO’s double-track decision. Still, the dominant pattern in-between these high-profile debates was one of a broad foreign policy consensus at least in the political elite.50 There are four reasons, however, to believe that the domestic context of German foreign policy has become more contentious since unification and that domestic constraints tend to make greater demands on foreign policy decision-makers.

First, current German governments can to a much lesser extent turn to the inherent necessities of international politics to justify their foreign policy than under the constraints of the bipolar international system. In the post-Cold War environment, Germany’s foreign policy is much less determined by its geopolitical position. Other than in highly extraordinary situations, German governments are therefore left with a greater scope for genuine choices between potentially viable alternatives, and decision-makers accordingly face greater pressures to defend their policies in the domestic arena. This trend is reinforced by the rising expectations of Germany’s international partners that post-unification Germany carries more of the burden of the Western alliance, most notably when it comes to military missions.51 German governments will ever more often be called upon to decide how to respond to such demands, which is likely to spark more contentious domestic debates the more far-reaching the international requests become. The room for legitimate domestic controversy over German foreign policy has thus become broader and is bound to expand further.

Second, the growth in opportunities for contesting the foreign policy choices of governments has come along with changes in the dynamics of German party politics which add to the

domestic politicisation of foreign policy. In particular, the current five-party system (of CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, Greens and the Left Party) represents a more heterogeneous spectrum of foreign policy orientations than the rather tranquil “two-and-a-half-party system” of old. While it was originally the Greens who challenged the foreign policy mainstream in the Bundestag, it is now the Left Party which is most vocal in arguing for fundamental alternatives to the established lines of thinking in German foreign policy. This is true, above all, for the party’s hostility to NATO, its (soft) euroscepticism and its radical pacifism. What is more, the increasing contentiousness of Germany’s foreign policy agenda has also left its mark on interparty and intraparty relations at the centre of the party system. Many of the highest-profile foreign policy issues in Germany in recent years have seen some degree of contestation between the government and the main opposition party or within and between the government parties themselves. Significant cases in point include the 1999 Kosovo War, the war on terror, the 2003 Iraq War, bilateral relations with Russia and the issue of Turkey’s membership to the EU – not to mention the most recent discussions over the Eurozone crisis and Libya. Since the fragmentation of the German party system tends to give rise – with the exception of Grand Coalitions – to weaker coalition governments with narrower majorities, moreover, German foreign policy has altogether become more vulnerable to party political contestation.

Third, such contestation has become more consequential due to the successive strengthening of the Bundestag in foreign affairs since the 1990s. Correspondingly, the Bundestag has become much more of a constraint on government decision-making in the field, most notably when it comes to European integration and to overseas missions of the German armed forces. This goes back mainly to a number of rulings of the German Constitutional Court, which has repeatedly pushed towards a greater involvement of the German parliament in European integration, most recently in its 2009 decision on the Lisbon treaty, and which has given the Bundestag the final say over foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr already in 1994. Since European integration and the deployments of the armed forces also tend to top the list of the

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most salient foreign affairs issues to members of the German parliament, it is in particular in these two fields in which the Bundestag has turned into an important arena of the domestic politicisation of foreign policy.

Fourth, the trend towards greater contestation over foreign affairs in the German political elite can be expected to trigger a stronger mobilisation of public opinion. Public attitudes towards foreign policy should thus increasingly become manifest rather than remain latent. Although the average public salience of foreign policy in Germany has so far remained comparatively low, events such as Kosovo, 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq or the introduction of Euro coins and notes in 2002 are all on record as having spurred pronounced upswings in public attention towards foreign affairs. Should it indeed become more common for German foreign policy to be involved in potentially controversial decisions on high-profile international issues, public opinion will more regularly become a politically relevant concern of decision-makers.

On the most general level, the enhanced role of public opinion in German foreign policy is set to reinforce the shift towards the role conception of a ‘normal ally’. Notably, different surveys report large majority support for a more self-confident approach of Germany to international affairs in general and to the EU in particular; and a majority in public opinion positively acknowledges that Germany has indeed become self-confident in its dealings with other countries. In marked contrast to the 1990s, a majority in public opinion has come to believe that Germany has a positive image abroad and rising numbers of respondents, almost three out of four in 2006, think that Germans should have a sense of national pride.

More specifically, public opinion is bound to encourage defensive and selective government responses to international demands regarding Germany’s role in European integration and in international military missions. For one, German public opinion has become more lukewarm about European integration since the early 1990s. The share of Germans who think that their country has benefitted from the EU now stands below the European average, trust in the EU

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60 See Hellmann, Rekonstruktion der „Hegemonie des Machtstaates Deutschland unter modernen Bedingungen“?, p.88.
has eroded, and German identity remains stubbornly national.\textsuperscript{64} For another, the German public is still highly sceptical of foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr, in particular if they involve anything resembling high-intensity combat missions. Although public opinion has become slightly more permissive in this respect and has supported, for example, German participation in NATO air strikes on Serbia in the 1999 Kosovo War,\textsuperscript{65} the Federal Republic’s traditional “culture of antimilitarism”\textsuperscript{66} clearly lives on in the general public. Thus, the share of respondents who believe that Germany should keep out of international military missions has almost doubled from 34\% in 2005 to 63\% in 2008, when only 19\% of respondents came out in support of further deployments abroad of the German armed forces.\textsuperscript{67} The rising demands on post-unification Germany to remain committed to European integration and to share more of the burden in international military operations were thus always likely to bring German governments into conflict with public opinion. The last two sections of the paper will now move on to investigate how the interplay between the shift in national role conceptions of decision-makers and the more contentious domestic context of German foreign policy has contributed to the German approach to the Eurozone crisis and to the NATO mission in Libya.

\textbf{European Integration and the Eurozone Crisis}

Already during the last years of the Kohl government and in particular under the Chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder, Germany’s “European vocation” has begun to become more contingent.\textsuperscript{68} Ever since, German European policy shows ample signs of the shifting role concepts of decision-makers and of being more circumscribed by domestic political concerns. What has become part of the new ‘normalcy’ of Germany’s approach to European integration is that it is increasingly guided by a narrow zero-sum view of the German national interest, which is – explicitly or implicitly – set against the demands placed on Germany by its European partners. Indeed, the Schröder government made a point of its objective to “make [Germany’s] partners in Europe understand that the Germans have a right to defend their interests as well”.\textsuperscript{69} No-one was to be left under any doubt that the era in which Germany could be relied upon to provide the necessary (financial) means to help overcome whichever European crisis “has come to its end”:

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\item\textsuperscript{64} Köcher, \textit{Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie} 2003–2009, pp.287-288.
\item\textsuperscript{65} Maull, ‘Germany and the Use of Force’, pp.64-65.
\item\textsuperscript{67} Köcher, \textit{Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie} 2003–2009, pp.318-319.
\item\textsuperscript{68} W.E. Paterson, ‘Does Germany Still Have a European Vocation?’, \textit{German Politics} 19/1 (2010), pp.41-52.
\item\textsuperscript{69} G. Schröder, \textit{Deutscher Bundestag}, Plenarprotokoll, 14/21, February 24, 1999, p.1525.
\end{itemize}
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“Germany wants to be a fair partner [in the EU]. But [...] we also expect fairness towards us. Solidarity in Europe and elsewhere is [...] no one-way street – this has to be recognised.”

Correspondingly, German European policy has become more inclined to push through its national interests in open conflict with other EU members. Foremost cases in point under the red-green government include Germany’s demands for lower net-contributions to the EU budget and for a greater weight in European decision-making, its open disregard for the European Stability and Growth Pact and its insistence on transitional provisions on the free movement of workers from the new Central and East European member states as well as its turning away from its role as honest broker of the interests of smaller EU countries. These examples also illustrate that the shift towards the role conception of a ‘normal country’ in the EU has gone hand in hand with a greater disposition of German European policy to play to the domestic gallery. Given the domestication of European integration, decision-makers increasingly feel the need to tailor their European policy to the demands of domestic politics. The extent to which German European policy will indeed provide the benign leadership to the EU that many of its partners demand can thus be expected to depend on the case-by-case judgments of German governments on what their domestic environment and closely related – their definition of the German national interest allow.

Along these lines, the Merkel government’s response to the Eurozone crisis has very much been presaged by the overall shift in German European policy since the mid-1990s. The most distinctive feature of Berlin’s policy in the crisis is that it was predominantly framed in terms of exclusive national interests which have to be defended against the demands of other member states. Thus, the Merkel government on various fronts confronts the expectations of its partners, makes Germany’s contribution to solving the crisis conditional on the compliance of other member states with German requests and threatens to use Germany’s economic and political power to block efforts at rescuing the Eurozone. Thus, Angela Merkel invokes the “interest of the German taxpayer” to stress that there will be “neither regular nor permanent...”

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73 Germany’s contribution to the successful negotiation of the Lisbon Treaty, in particular during its 2007 council presidency, provides a recent positive example in which the Grand Coalition under Angela Merkel has played a constructive leadership role that was widely welcomed by its European partners. See W.E. Paterson, ‘The Reluctant Hegemon? Germany Moves Centre Stage in the European Union”, Journal of Common Market Studies 49/Annual Review (2011), pp.63-64.
transfers”\textsuperscript{74}. Every debtor country “must do its homework” and “assistance must always be tied to strict conditions”.\textsuperscript{75} Notably, Merkel was at her most outspoken in an interview with the leading German tabloid, the \textit{Bild}:

“But there will be no transfer union on my watch. Every country is responsible for its debts. [Loans for the debtor countries] can only be decided by unanimity, Germany can thus put in a veto if the conditions for assistance are not fulfilled, and I will make use of that if necessary. [Countries] which need loans must meet our conditions.”\textsuperscript{76}

Cloaked in the German national interest, the Merkel government has thus throughout been highly reluctant in deploying German resources on a scale demanded by other EU members. While this reluctance has been the source of widespread criticisms from abroad, the government discourse has to an important extent been aimed at the domestic audience. Indeed, the domestic context was highly challenging for the government in three respects. First, public opinion on the Eurozone crisis was highly mobilised and deeply sceptical of a more accommodating German approach. For one, there is no other single issue which enjoyed more attention in the German public political discourse over the last two years: the crisis had more coverage in the main German TV news programmes than any other issue in 2010 and was again the most covered issue in the second half of 2011.\textsuperscript{77} The Merkel government’s handling of the Eurozone crisis was thus under the most intense public scrutiny. For another, the German public was clearly hostile to any measures that smacked of carrying ever larger financial burdens or risks for Germany. This holds, most notably, for giving further financial assistance to Greece (and other countries), for extending the EU bailout fund and for the introduction of Eurobonds (see table 1). Such attitudes were stoked, not the least, by a highly populist anti-Greece campaign of the \textit{Bild} tabloid in February/March 2010. The hard-line posturing of the Merkel government was thus well-adapted to – and served to further reinforce – the overall sentiments in German public opinion.

Second, the German response to the Eurozone crisis was constrained by the fragile state of the conservative-liberal coalition government and in particular by the weakness of the Liberal junior partner to the coalition. One, the FDP tried to halt the collapse of its poll ratings by establishing itself as an extra tough champion of the German national interest. In particular, the Liberals missed no opportunity to rail at the idea of Eurobonds which the party blew up into a make-or-break issue for the coalition. Two, the leadership of the FDP was under intense pressure from within the party to maintain an uncompromising stance in the crisis. The


\textsuperscript{75} A. Merkel, \textit{Deutscher Bundestag}, Plenarprotokoll, 17/135, October 26, 2011, p.15951.


\textsuperscript{77} For the full data see Institut für empirische Medienforschung, ‘InfoMonitor’, http://www.ifem.de/infomonitor.
intraparty divisions within the Liberals came to a head in October 2011, when a eurosceptic member of the FDP group in the Bundestag forced a referendum among party members which was aimed at compelling the party leadership to oppose the European Stability Mechanism and which – had it been successful – would likely have spelled the end of the coalition.

Third, the Merkel government had to be wary of opposition attempts at politicising its handling of the crisis. If anything, this became obvious in May 2010 when the Social Democrats failed to support the government in a Bundestag vote on a 750 billion Euro rescue package for the Eurozone.\(^78\) Given the general mood in public opinion, the government would have been most vulnerable to opposition accusations of being too soft in standing up for German interests, and its approach to the crisis precisely worked to foreclose opposition strategies to this effect. While the government certainly invites the main opposition to voice criticism from a pro-European perspective, this line of attack holds altogether less promise of resonating with voters.

Table 1: German Public Opinion on the Eurozone Crisis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public opinion on selected measures to manage the crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further EU financial assistance for Greece(^a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial assistance for Greece and other countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extending the EU bailout fund(^b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurobonds(^c)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public evaluation of Angela Merkel and her government in the crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance of Angela Merkel in defending German interests(^d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance of the government in the crisis(^e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Merkel’s reaction to the crisis(^f)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work of Angela Merkel in the crisis(^g)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party most trusted to secure the stability of the Euro(^h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data Sources:*

\(^a\) Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, ZDF Politbarometer, June 10, 2011.

\(^b\) YouGov, Der Spiegel 38/2011, September 19, p.23

\(^c\) Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, ZDF Politbarometer, September 9, 2011.

\(^d\) Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, ZDF Politbarometer, November 25, 2011.

\(^e\) TNS Emnid, Focus 35/2011, p.24.

\(^f\) Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, ZDF Politbarometer, September 9, 2011.


\(^h\) Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, ZDF Politbarometer, December 16, 2011

\(^i\) Infratest dimap, ARD DeutschlandTrend, December 2011, p.7.

\(^78\) See Paterson, ‘The Reluctant Hegemon?’, p.70.
In summary, Germany’s much maligned approach to the Eurozone crisis was more than anything driven by the Merkel government’s concerns with managing a highly constraining domestic environment. This preoccupation with the domestic arena at the expense of European expectations was fostered by realignments in the national role conceptions of German decision-makers since the late 1990s. While Germany’s stance in the crisis has been met with strident criticism in other EU member states, it should be noted that it was so far rather successful in passing the test of domestic politics. In particular as far as her own political standing and the prospects of her party are concerned, Chancellor Merkel has played a difficult domestic hand rather well. Although the German public is certainly critical of the performance of the government as a whole, the role of Angela Merkel personally is seen in a more positive light, and the Christian Democrats are by a wide margin better trusted to cope with the Eurozone crisis than their competitors (see table 1).

The Use of Military Force and the NATO Mission in Libya
The shift among decision-makers towards the role conception of a ‘normal ally’ has nowhere become more evident than with respect to Germany’s stance on international military missions. The most notable milestones of this shift again fall into the tenure of the red-green government. First, Germany’s taking part in the 1999 Kosovo War and its contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and ISAF in the aftermath of 9/11 signified that post-unification Germany would no longer reflexively rule out its participation in large-scale military interventions and would rather want to be seen as living up to the greater expectations ascribed to it in the Western alliance. Indeed, the Schröder government invoked its decision to provide military support to the ‘war on terror’ to claim a new international role for Germany:

“The readiness also to make military contributions to [international] security is an important affirmation of Germany’s alliances and partnerships. But more than that: The readiness to fulfil our enhanced responsibilities for international security implies that the self-conception of German foreign policy has developed further.”

Second, the Schröder government’s strong display of alliance solidarity in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks from then on served decision-makers to assert their claim to decide on a case-by-case basis on whether and how Germany contributes to international military operations. In particular, the German record in standing to its allies on the Balkans and in Afghanistan was employed to open up argumentative space for rejecting further demands of its partners regarding the Bundeswehr’s international engagement. This pattern became most consequential in flanking the decision of the red-green government not to

support the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. This decision, Chancellor Schröder argued, should not be taken to call into question Germany’s reliability as a partner to the Western alliance:

“Germany stands by its obligations in NATO. When a partner is attacked, we will defend it. We have demonstrated as much – not only, but above all – when it came to our support for Operation Enduring Freedom [and when] we extended this operation. […] Few NATO members do as much as we do. This must not be forgotten! […] The Federal Republic – this has to be made clear all over the world as well – has taken on international responsibilities to an extent that would have been difficult to imagine a few years ago: responsibility on the Balkans and, above all things, responsibility after the devastating terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.”

Also, the red-green government made a conscious effort at minimising any adverse consequences of its Iraq policy for Germany’s reputation among its partners. Short of the active participation in the Iraq War, the government was keen to offer German logistical support for the US and other allies, and its decision after the war to increase Germany’s contribution to ISAF was partly seen to compensate for its failure to support the US on Iraq.

As for the use of military force, therefore, the hallmark of the nascent role concept as a ‘normal ally’ is that governments self-confidently insist on their right to invoke the German national interest to decide on a case-by-case basis whether or not they will contribute troops to international military missions. All the same, governments, in principle, accept that post-unification Germany increasingly faces legitimate international demands to this effect. Thus, defence minister Thomas de Maizière summarises what is now taken for granted among German foreign policy decision-makers:

“Germany is ready – as the expression of its will to national self-assertion and its national sovereignty – to deploy the full range of national means within the bounds of international law to protect its security. This also includes the deployment of military forces. Military missions have far-reaching consequences, not least politically. […] Therefore, each individual case requires a clear-cut answer to the question in how far the direct or indirect interests of Germany or the exercise of international responsibility require and justify the respective military operation; but also [to the question] which consequences the decision not to participate in the mission would have.”

Germany’s stance on Libya, in turn, precisely accords with this role concept. In abstaining on the NATO mission in the UN Security Council, the Merkel government withstood massive pressure of its allies to come out in their support and demonstrated once again that international expectations of alliance solidarity no longer rank as the predominant driving force in German foreign policy. Rather, the government made a point of referring to the German national interest to explain its policy:

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“The international community says: [in Libya] can be intervened. And we reserve the right, in the German interest, to say: we will not be involved this time. [...] We are not convinced of this military operation.”

At the same time, the Merkel government tried – with limited success – to contain the expectable negative consequences of its stance for Germany’s international reputation. Similar to the Schröder government on Iraq, it called to mind the substantial engagement of the Bundeswehr in international military missions to counter the charge that Germany is not taking on a fair share of the burden in NATO. More specifically, Berlin decided to make available up to 300 more German troops for AWACS reconnaissance flights over Afghanistan, in order to offer relief to NATO-partners who are engaged in Libya and to send “a political signal of alliance solidarity”.

Moreover, the role conception of a ‘normal ally’ has not only prepared the Merkel government for defying the expectations of its Western partners on Libya in the name of Germany’s national interest, but has also predisposed it to give more room to domestic political concerns. In particular, the government approach was driven by two closely related features of the domestic environment which have already been singled out as important influences on the German response to the Eurozone crisis.

Table 2: German Public Opinion on Libya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Wrong</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German abstention in Security Council</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>March 28, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German non-participation in military mission</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>March 29-31, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO mission in Libya</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>March 29-31, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which actions should Germany take against Gaddafi?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade embargo</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>March 10-11, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for a no-fly zone</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military intervention</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, the Merkel government had to reckon with a general public that was strongly primed to focus its attention on developments in Libya and which was sceptical of any German military involvement in the crisis. Thus, the situation in Libya was easily the most salient issue in the German public discourse when the government had to sort out its course of action and by a

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wide margin topped the list of the most-covered political issues in the main German TV news programmes in March and April 2011.\textsuperscript{88} Moreover, clear majorities in public opinion were against a military engagement of Germany in Libya, although the public was more supportive of the NATO mission itself. Germany’s abstention in the UN Security Council, in turn, was backed by a solid majority of 56% in public opinion (see table 2).

Second, Germany’s stance on Libya was arguably shaped by the dire political straits of the junior partner to Angela Merkel’s government. Indeed, the FDP appeared set to use its control of the Foreign Office to distinguish itself by spearheading the government’s opposition to the NATO mission. The prospect of taking advantage of the crisis to reverse the party’s political fortunes must have been particularly tempting in view of two imminent regional elections on March 27, 2011. Chief among the pointers which stress the crucial role of the Liberals in government decision-making are media reports that foreign minister Westerwelle overruled the advice of career diplomats in the Foreign Office to vote in favour of Resolution 1973.\textsuperscript{89} Should there be something to the widespread speculation – which is officially denied by the government – that Westerwelle initially wanted the government to vote against the resolution and that Germany’s eventual abstention came about as an intra-coalition compromise, any line of argument emphasising the impact of the party political interests of the FDP on coalition decision-making would become even more plausible.\textsuperscript{90} In any case, these party political interests would help explain why the Merkel government has not seriously entertained the much recommended option to vote in favour of Resolution 1973 but to decline making a military contribution to Unified Protector, which was indeed the path chosen by Portugal. Such a nuanced stance, however, would have been difficult to communicate in the domestic arena and would from the outset have been unlikely to yield any of the electoral benefits the Liberals may have hoped for. The opposition parties are thus not alone in assuming that the decision to abstain on Resolution 1973 was strongly driven by “domestic political motives”\textsuperscript{91}, in particular of the FDP. If this was indeed the case, however, the domestic calculus of the coalition did not work out, since the Liberals were again trounced in both regional elections on March 27.

\textsuperscript{88} For the full data see Institut für empirische Medienforschung, ‘InfoMonitor’, http://www.ifem.de/infomonitor.
\textsuperscript{89} The Economist, ‘The Unadventurous Eagle’, May 14, 2011.
\textsuperscript{91} R. Mützenich, Deutscher Bundestag, Plenarprotokoll, 17/97, March 18, 2011, p.11140.
Conclusion
Germany’s widely criticised approach to the Eurozone crisis and to the NATO mission in Libya are expressions of a broader trend in German foreign policy. Overall, this policy has become less preoccupied with the expectations of Germany’s Western partners, more domestic politics driven – and thus altogether more volatile and unpredictable. The paper has argued that this development can be accounted for by a shift in the national role conceptions of decision-makers and an increasingly challenging domestic environment. First, the nascent move towards the role concept of Germany as a ‘normal country’ or ‘normal ally’ prompts decision-makers to attach less weight to international demands and to allow more room for domestic concerns. Second, the domestic arena of German foreign policy has become more politicised and contentious. Thus, Germany’s foreign policy is evermore marked out by the self-confident pursuit of narrow national interests, which are increasingly likely to be defined with a view towards domestic politics.

Along these lines, the Merkel government’s policy on the Eurozone crisis and Libya stand for the new ‘normalcy’ in German foreign policy. For one, both cases speak to the greater readiness of decision-makers to assert the German national interest against the expectations of Germany’s partners. For another, the government response to the two issues was strongly geared to a rather inhospitable domestic context, most notably with respect to the highly mobilised public opinion and the fragile state of the junior partner to Angela Merkel’s government. The likelihood, therefore, is that German foreign policy will ever more frequently come under attack for disregarding the wishes of its partners – and that 2011 was no aberration in this respect.