In this book, the authors argue that Germany will follow the legacy of Ostpolitik to a large extent. It mainly concerns the relations of Germany towards the Czech Republic and Poland since reunification. The authors critically assess the reasons behind German foreign policy towards these two countries with reference to borders, territory, identities, minorities and population transfers. Their approach is based on both foreign policy analysis and constructivist international relations theory (pp. 9-13).

The book begins by summarizing the historic legacy of German-Czech and German-Polish relations before the Second World War and in the Cold War period. Tensions were mainly due to the identity of minorities from both sides, especially with regard to Germans in East Prussia (pp. 16-29), and the Second World War was a miserable period for mutual relations. The historical legacy of the minority issue still plays a crucial role in the bilateral relations of Germany towards these two countries, as it still influences the making of German foreign policy to some extent (pp. 106-130). In the early years of the Cold War period, Germany officially separated into two states and Poland and the Czech Republic were under the control of the communist Soviet Union. In order to ‘rebuild’ its role and responsibility and clarify its position, there was hardly any contact between West Germany and Poland and the Czech Republic in this early period.

With the gradual release of tension between both camps and the personal persistence of Willy Brandt, the idea of Ostpolitik was put forward, within the framework of which political conversation and economic cooperation began from both sides. The book further demonstrates how the model of Ostpolitik has developed in recent times, mainly through Germany’s economic engagement in these countries. Though a profound fluctuation of the policy could be noticed in different governments and some controversies may still be unavoidable, the main aim of cooperation can still be discerned (pp. 82-105). Germany’s foreign policy towards the Czech Republic and Poland has also blossomed in the wake of the eastern enlargement of the European Union. The authors then compare the approaches of different German parties. Despite slight differences, there seems to be agreement that good relations with both countries can benefit Germany in the long run (pp. 80-81). A final conclusion in the last two chapters claims that mutual integration from both sides will be the main strategy of German foreign policy makers (pp. 131-165).

The book is well written and well organized with solid arguments and
AUSTRAUSCH, VOL. 1, NO. 2, OCTOBER 2011

insightful analysis. In terms of mutual economic interdependence, its overall position in the EU and the strategic concerns of geopolitics, Germany will insist on a friendly and cooperative foreign policy with these eastern neighbors. The authors manage to point out the importance of economic interdependence. Germany itself, in order to utilize the relatively cheap labor force, stimulate its exporting industry and address concerns about the overall interests of the European Union, will continue to develop and enhance its relations to Poland and the Czech Republic. The German government has also benefited much from these, and this is a ‘win-win’ strategy for Germany in the new era, especially in the recovery period after the economic recession. Based on a constructivist approach, by which international relations are understood as an interactive agent-structure social phenomenon and norms and rules play the predominant roles in inter-state relations, the idea of this book stands on a positive point of ‘European Integration’ and it examines a solid agreement to prove this point. Instead of using a realist approach to explain Germany’s action as a way to preserve power, the authors used a constructed and developmental method to analyze changes in its foreign policy. Different parties may have various opinions about the change and continuity of Ostpolitik, yet the authors can still conclude the common point of German interests. This book shows this point of integration and illustrates the different opinions of different parties of Germany, coming to clear conclusions.

Nevertheless, this book seems to neglect to consider perspectives from both Poland and the Czech Republic. Both countries are located in the heart of continental Europe and they play a crucial role as far as geopolitical strategy is concerned. With the aid of European Union, especially through the framework of the European Single Market, both countries have been enjoying a relatively high speed of economic development. But the rise of nationalism, especially in the case in Poland, may have a negative influence on Germany’s strategy towards these countries. For example, the active role of Poland in NATO may have had a certain influence on Germany’s foreign policy towards Poland. As for the Czech Republic, the tough attitude against the enlargement of the Eurozone can also have a negative impact on German foreign policy. Therefore, it would have been better if the book could have shown more concern for this point of view.