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**The “2014 Review”:  
Understanding the Pillars of  
German Foreign Policy and the  
Expectations of the rest of  
the World**

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**Annegret Bendiek**

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Study Committee for Franco-German Relations

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# Executive Summary

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German foreign policy is today confronted with a number of fundamental challenges. The country has become larger and has again become strong economically and must no longer content itself with its former role as France's political junior partner in Europe or the United States' junior partner in the world. At the same time, Berlin is far from being fully prepared for taking over this new role – deficits are both strategic and conceptual. Neither the political class nor the media, not to mention the German society, holds concise ideas about German interests in Europe and the world beyond the promotion of peace and justice.

Germany's political class has not failed to take note of this unsatisfactory situation. As one of the first measures of his new and second term in office, foreign minister Steinmeier announced in 2013 the "self-reflection on the perspectives of German foreign policy" (Steinmeier 2013), which was translated into the "Review 2014 – Außenpolitik Weiter Denken" project.

The debate on Germany's future foreign and security policy has, however, only just begun. The Review did certainly not end it, but represents merely a snapshot of the longer process during which the country will outgrow its postwar role as France's and the United States' junior partner. The Review itself can only in a limited way provide an answer to the question of in which direction this reorientation should happen and how far it should go.

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# Introduction

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Today German foreign policy is facing a series of fundamentally important challenges. Germany has gained in maturity and consolidated its economic strength, so it cannot and must not continue in the role of junior political partner with France and the United States on the international stage. In view of Germany's new economic and political weight, the country faces greater responsibilities in relation to European and international crises, in comparison with the situation twenty years ago. However, the country remains ill-prepared for this role, both conceptually and strategically. Neither the German political class, the media or even civil society have any clear representation of what Germany's interests should be in Europe and in the world, beyond the requirements of peace and justice. These factors are not sufficient to guide the action taken by Germany's political representatives, whether in the context of diplomatic relations in the Near East, the European financial crisis or in relation to digital challenges. Piecemeal policies and short-term crisis management have played too dominant a role in German foreign policy in the past.

The unsatisfactory nature of this situation has certainly not escaped the political representatives. Thus one of the first measures announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for its second term of office in 2013 related to "clarifying German foreign policy perspectives" (Steinmeier, 2013), and its concomitant transposition to the project called "2014 Review: understanding tomorrow's foreign policy". The project was the fruit of the experts' debate initiated by the Marshall Fund and the Wissenschaft und Politik Foundation under the title "new power, new responsibilities" (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2013). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Christoph Bertram, a special adviser and formerly Director of the Stability and Growth Pact, to nurture the year-long process. The Review's progress focused, as Steinmeier put it,

*"on something much more fundamental: today we need a considered, reasonable discourse which will provide an institutional framework for our actions on the international stage and which will make us aware of the extent of the responsibilities we will be able to shoulder in the next ten or twenty years, as well as the limitations on our ability to act. I do not intend to initiate the traditional interministerial process, but I do want to institute a dialogue between the Foreign Affairs administration and*

*the most important stakeholders in terms of foreign policy and security services, including representatives of civil society" (Steinmeier 2013).*

The Minister's initiative seems to be one aspect of a broader effort to address Germany's conceptual and strategic deficit. The Defence Minister, Ursula von der Leyen, and the Federal President, Joachim Gauck, accompanied the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Munich Security Conference in February 2014. It provided the opportunity to make public opinion aware of Germany's new responsibilities and to call for a reassessment of Germany's role in Europe and the world.

*"Are we doing what we can to stabilise our neighbourhood, both in the East and in Africa? Are we doing what we have to in order to counter the threat of terrorism? And, in cases where we have found convincing reasons to join our allies in taking even military action, are we willing to bear our fair share of the risks? Are we doing what we should to attract new and reinvigorated major powers to the cause of creating a just world order for tomorrow? Do we even evince the interest in some parts of the world which is their due, given their importance? What role do we want to play in the crises afflicting distant parts of the globe? Are we playing an active enough role in that field in which the Federal Republic of Germany has developed such expertise? I am speaking, of course, of conflict prevention." (Gauck 2014).*

These speeches shared a common trait in that in front of an international audience composed of conference participants and a heavy media presence, they announced that the Germans were favourably disposed towards further foreign policy engagement. Both the President and the Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasised that the Federal Republic should bring "more reactive, resolute and substantial" responses to international challenges. The President explicitly praised the Review plan launched by the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

*"This would be a step towards a new understanding of society by society. Talking about how, where and when we should seek to defend our values and our security will gradually give us greater clarity about the extent and aims of Germany's international involvement" (Gauck 2014).*

The search for a new direction in foreign policy and security was conceived as a three-stage process, and the first stage, in particular, has been internationally acclaimed (see the New York Times and Handelsblatt). The process would not depend on determining national interests but would be based on the perspectives and assessments suggested by the international community. Thus 57 contributing experts from 26 different countries were asked intentionally direct questions: "What, if anything, is wrong

with German foreign policy? What needs to be changed?" (Steinmeier 2014a). The responses were published on the Review's web page - [www.review2014.de](http://www.review2014.de) -, thus provoking debate. The second stage took place against the backdrop of efforts to widen the circles involved in the reflection process. As a result, officers from the Foreign Affairs Office took part in more than 60 discussions with citizens, round tables, conferences and crisis simulation workshops all over Germany to stimulate critical discussion on current foreign policy themes. In the third stage – the only one which has not been made public – those working in the department of Foreign Affairs examined the extent to which changes on the international stage suggest they should take a new approach to action.

The exercise, which effectively opens up the process of reformulating German foreign and security policy, is perfectly understandable in the light of Germany's past. Not only is the idea of a policy expressing the national interest taboo for most of the German political class, but it also receives limited support in the context of discussions between experts. Since 1945 Germany has been rigorously determined to view her own interests as being identical with European interests, and to consider her firm commitment to the EU and NATO as essential aspects of her foreign or security policy. It is obvious nonetheless that a convincing strategy must also take account of her national interests, even if these remain as close to those of Europe and NATO as possible. Consequently, the Review process appears for the most part as dithering between the determination of German interests and a reluctance to call these by their true name or view them as such. As a result, it falls to the opinion publicly expressed by the international experts to give a clear statement of what Germans themselves dare not state.

The expectations referred to above have been only partially met. The statements made by the international experts have demonstrated a clear task, while simultaneously highlighting two potential areas of tension which German policy must try and resolve autonomously.



## “Germany in Europe and because of Europe”

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“Germany in Europe and because of Europe”: this is not just a diplomatic platitude frequently heard from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but is also the clear explicit request made by the great majority of contributors. First of all Germany must affirm its leadership to a greater extent. At the same time – and this is the second important task – the importance thereby accorded to Germany is linked to the desire for a more significant engagement in European policy. However, there is still no answer to the question whether this desire for “more Germany” also contains an acceptance of a German policy which gives greater expression to her national interests, or whether it is just a question of increased financial and logistical contributions.

Virtually all the contributors see Germany as a role model with “a shrewd, prudent and responsible foreign policy” (Annan 2014, see also Müller 2014), “a pillar of the multilateral, rule-based international system” (Annan 2014). Similarly, nearly all the contributors express their regret and inability to understand the fact that Germany is behaving too hesitantly and is underestimating her potential (Chellaney 2014, Shikwati 2014). Germany appears to be a solid democracy guided by a stable set of values (Moridian 2014), a strong economy and yet a country with an under-developed international conscience (Mahbubani 2014, Annan 2014, Arbour 2014). In the main, criticism relates to a reduced focus on German interests, poor ability to design and lead projects, and finally to an excessive preoccupation with economic objectives, which have led some commentators to point their finger at “economisation of German foreign policy” (Swieboda 2014).

Criticism of Germany’s European policy is stated in particularly clear terms (Ash 2014, Schwarzer 2014). It appears to be influenced by short-term interests and to lack the will to undertake more far-reaching strategic projects (Tocci 2014). Unless Germany is more closely involved as a “soft power”(Sidiropoulos 2014) or as a “model European” (Techau 2014), at the very least alongside France, the process of European integration would lose momentum and Europe would not resolve its most essential challenges:

*“However one is to define the centre of the EU – as the Franco-German axis, the Weimar Triangle or the interplay of Berlin, Paris and London – none of these models of the decision-making centre of the EU is possible without including Germany.” (Münkler, 2014).*

There is, moreover, a debate as to whether Germany should go her own way when her convictions lead her down a different path to the one followed by her European neighbours. Whereas Garton Ash, Sir Lawrence Freedman, Charles Grant and Louise Arbour are highly critical of Germany's decision not to participate in the UN Security Council's decision on Libya, others – such as the German researcher Harald Müller, a specialist in the field of international peace, and many Asian contributors (Müller 2014, Asian contributors) – praise Germany's restraint in foreign policy matters, which is very explicit in this instance.

China's external point of view favours a unified, more marked role for Europe on the world stage, a process which is only considered feasible if Germany takes on the role of leader.

*"Germany needs to have the courage to forge a pioneer group within the EU, further deepening the integration process within and meanwhile forming common positions and actions on international issues. (...) The only realist approach would be allowing some countries to go first, the rest could catch up later on if they want" (Zhongping 2014).*

Apart from the financial crisis, the biggest challenges in this process are Chinese policy and Russian policy. Unless Europe manages to speak and act with one voice – under German leadership – it risks seeing its member states pitted against each other by China and Russia (Grant 2014, Godement 2014, Heilmann 2014).

The general appreciation of Germany's European policy and the desire for a stronger German presence in Europe and because of Europe are, on the one hand, extremely welcome. However, it is important not to get deluded, given that the questions about fundamental strategic direction remain unanswered. The most important of these questions concerns on the one hand, the weight given to the transatlantic alliance, and on the other the opening-up to other powers like India, China and Brazil. Must Germany invariably follow the United States when it comes to matters of world policy? Does the recognition of the United States' central role in European peace imply that, if in doubt, Germany's own interests must come second to the interests of other powers? Is it appropriate for Germany to decide cases individually in this domain, considering that the transatlantic partnership is only one dimension of her foreign and security policy?

Finding an answer to the question of Germany's modes of engagement in the world is equally urgent. In the course of the last five decades Germany's foreign and security policy has been governed by the principle of maximum discretion. If Germany really had to enter the fray, she would only do so if the allies did the same, and if the allies did the same, it had to be done by causing as little internal controversy as possible on topics like the environment and human rights. Even so, is it possible to reconcile everything? Can Germany continue to deny herself a clear position on the question of

which world she wants to live in and which tools she is ready to use, if the other states don't share her ideas? Shouldn't the question of whether Germany is willing to go to war to defend human rights in other countries be answered on the basis of strategy?

# Transatlantic Alliance versus Openness to the Emerging Powers

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The question of the relationship between the transatlantic alliance and openness to what are called the emerging powers, is often posed in the context of a debate on the United States' leadership. There have been many calls for a stronger German presence and a more independent profile in foreign policy matters. Mahbubani even ascribes the role of "multilateralis[ing] America" and "Europeanis[ing] Russia" to the EU (Mahbubani 2014). Kofi Annan sees Germany and Europe as the avant-garde in terms of world climate policy, capable in the near future of imposing their position on the United States, provided they speak with one voice. Germany seems to be a potential intermediary between the industrial North and the emerging countries like "Japan, South Africa and Nigeria" with which it "shares reformist ambitions" (Adebajo & Virk, 2014). Germany's Russian policy should not be confined to the conflict in the Crimea but should "fit the approach toward Russia into the broader Eurasian strategy, which also includes China and India, as well as other major Eurasian players such as Turkey and Iran" (Trenin 2014, see also Godement 2014). Experts in the field of international peace like Harald Müller maintain that in matters of foreign policy, instead of Germany automatically aligning itself with the United States, "restraint is a good guiding principle" which would have prevented many difficulties in the past: "Seldom has Germany demonstrated as great a sense of responsibility as when it stayed out of the Iraq War in 2003". In the long term Germany has been proved right in choosing not to participate in the either the Second Iraq War or the UN Security Council resolution on Libya (Müller 2014).

Yet from another point of view, explicit warnings are being given against challenging the transatlantic alliance and overestimating the differences of opinion over the NSA or Israeli policy (Krause 2014). For many contributors, the unwavering attachment to the West seems to be "the key political and strategic issue for Europe", as the increase in military contributions for NATO should demonstrate. All the "dreams of neutrality and equidistance" (Techau, 2014) are met with a ruling of non-admissibility. "The US, working through NATO, is the principal cause of peace in Europe, not the EU" (Mearsheimer 2014). Wolffsohn appears to view the alliance with the USA as a real existential question: "Without the US there is no NATO, and thus no protection" (Wolffsohn 2014). In this context Germany is also being called upon to give clear support to the TTIP,

the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (Ash 2014, Kerber 2014). It seems that in the future it will be necessary to “draw a clear line between “communities of interest” and real partners” (Stein & Tempel 2014). Given that strategic partnerships are invariably long-term relationships, these should remain limited to countries like the USA and EU member states, which have a comparable system of values. On the other hand, the “communities of interest” can be considerably enlarged, while ensuring that only defined policies are implemented, such as the fight against climate warming and the development of trade relations.

The disagreement among international experts on the position Germany should adopt, between the transatlantic link and the rest of the world, can also be seen in German public opinion in the broadest sense, and in the German political parties, where representatives of both positions are in evidence. Thus, opening up the debate has at best resulted in what looks like a fragmented whole. To put it another way, the ball is back in the policy court again and we must call on policy makers to say what Germany’s interests are and to make proposals as to how German interests can be adequately transcribed amid the conflicts described above.

## Responsibility to Civil Society or to World Policy?

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There is considerably more agreement among foreign policy experts regarding the extent of Germany's engagement in the world. Without exception, they take the position that Germany should be more engaged and should thereby play a part in resolving numerous conflicts. The work undertaken in relation to her Nazi past, reconciliation with France – formerly the traditional enemy – and the momentum of European integration, all constitute a model of success which can benefit other countries and regions of the world. Germany should increase her participation in development aid to 0.7% of GDP and concentrate on the type of area in which she has already demonstrated unquestionable success. Similarly, there are calls for increased involvement in the International Court of Justice and in reforming the UN Security Council. The "three pillars of the rule of law" – the police, the judicial system and the enforcement of sentences – could become Germany's distinctive trademark for managing international conflicts (Wieland-Karimi 2014, see also Arbour 2014). For this reason she should support the African Standby Force (ASF), which is under overall UN command (Adebajo & Virk 2014, Annan 2014), with "responsibility to protect" as her guiding principle (Annan 2014, Tocci 2014). Lastly, she should use her preeminent expertise in renewable energy to benefit world climate policy, with the aim of reaching a speedy political conclusion and transposing ambitious climate objectives. However, Germany must begin by designating its own international climate obligations as domestic policy objectives, and the same must apply to anti-corruption measures.

While the Crimea crisis and relations with Russia have been tackled within the traditional framework of international conflicts (see, in particular, Mearshimer 2014) and have therefore given rise to very diverse responses, even extending to relaunching the European enlargement process (Tocci 2014, Keyman 2014), the question of stabilising the South invariably seems to be linked with strengthening Germany's economic engagement and opening the European markets up to goods and people (Shikwati 2014, Siridopoulos 2014). There have been calls to remove import taxes on agricultural products (Adebajo & Virk, 2014), and similarly support for the "sub-regional pillars" like Nigeria, South Africa and Algeria. Germany should reduce her dependence on Russian gas by importing more gas from Algeria and Nigeria, and in very general terms should

encourage a "preventive stabilisation policy at the European periphery" (Münkler 2014, also Stein & Tempel 2014) to combat the flood of refugees, economic poverty and despair. In all these areas Germany can count on her acknowledged moral authority, something which is mentioned all too rarely in domestic policy, with the result that she is out of kilter with her economic weight.

In contrast to the agreement among foreign policy experts, German public opinion wants to see more restraint in the way Germany acts internationally. A 2014 study by the Körber Foundation showed that only 37% of Germans were in favour of Germany playing a more active role in the world, and 60% supported the idea that Germany should "continue to demonstrate restraint". Membership of a political party was not a determining factor in rejecting increased engagement; which was in evidence right across the political spectrum. The fields of action considered as important in terms of foreign policy were firstly "humanitarian aid" and "diplomatic negotiations", whereas only half of those surveyed supported accepting refugees. Military engagement and arms delivery, even to allied countries, were only approved by 13% of respondents. Overall there is a flagrant contradiction between the ideas promoted by the experts and the demands made by German public opinion. This is another area in which policy must play its part in educating public opinion rather than backing away from controversial topics.

## Germany needs a Strategy

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The debate about Germany's foreign and security policy has barely started. The Review, which has certainly not ended the debate, represents one of several milestones in the long process by which Germany is emancipating herself from the role she has had since the end of the war, as France's junior partner in Europe and as the United States' junior partner in the world. The Review itself only provides a limited answer to the question of the direction these new developments should take, and how far they should go. In the final analysis, the international experts, political class and German public opinion only agree on the fact that Germany's engagement in Europe should be increased. Whenever anyone broaches the question of the methods and resources which should be used to achieve this end, differences immediately come to light. Where, ultimately, the international experts expect Germany to make greater financial commitments, public opinion – in which we include the Bundestag and the Constitutional Court – is already proving recalcitrant. Opinions are even more divergent once we come to the question of the relative weighting accorded to transatlantic cooperation on the one hand, and orientation towards the rest of the world, on the other. In summary, on the question of the exact role which Germany can and should play in the world, there is no longer any common ground between the international experts and German public opinion.

In all these matters, what Germany needs is political management. It is both inappropriate and unacceptable for policy to hide behind public hearings, surveys or consultations with experts: policy must take a position and have the courage to decide. The fundamental ethical values of a foreign and security policy must be stated before guidelines for action can be worked out. Moreover, transatlantic cooperation, European unification and collaboration with the rest of the world cannot result in individual programmes but must be part of a unified approach to determining a fundamental ethical position. This is the only way in which the different aspects will make sense and the only way that the conflicts which are likely to arise between the different policies can be resolved in a coherent manner. Decisions like not intervening in Libya alongside the Allies cannot stand up to criticism if they are made in a sort of strategic vacuum and lack any political connection.

Conversely, when these decisions are based on an ethically based foreign and security policy which is internationally responsible, they become comprehensible and coherent for our partners. The



same applies to the financial resources required to stabilise the eurozone. As things stand at present, there is no objective way of justifying their appropriateness and, ultimately, their amount. In the context of a comprehensive foreign and security policy, or a European policy based on a clearly expressed strategy, decisions in these different domains can be made on firmer foundations, with the effect that they will be readily accepted. In its own interests, therefore, German foreign and security policy must remedy its asceticism as regards strategy and take clear positions, thus opening a discussion whose political relevance to the question of Germany's role in Europe and the world will become progressively more assertive. The 2014 Review is only the first step in the right direction.

Human rights and democracy should be at the heart of Germany's position. Experience has shown that democracies do not declare war on each other. Democracy can only exist if a state respects human rights and plays a full part in the international community. This be the focus for Germany's initial engagement in Europe and the world. From this point of view, European integration and transatlantic cooperation appear to be essential. Germany must play an active part in developing the relevant institutional structures for both of these aims, so as to strengthen the supranational organisational principles and cooperation between democracies. In the same way it is crucial for Germany that her actions serve to improve the conditions in which democracy operates throughout the world. NATO must not simply appear to be a defensive wall against Russia but must be the kernel of an alliance between democracies. NATO's missions include developing favourable conditions for democracy throughout the world, as well as helping to assert human rights and increasing our ability to identify situations where human rights are under threat. The current climate is a favourable one for German foreign and security policy to speak out on these crucial questions, instead of being preoccupied with day-to-day political business. The European Union will be planning a new security strategy, and Germany's foreign and security policy will be the subject of a White Paper.

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