



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE

Report

Normal at Last? German Strategic Culture and the Holocaust

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ABSTRACT

The hope for or fear of a more 'normal' German state behaviour within foreign and security policy – understood as a type of behaviour that is more focussed and based on power and power politics, like the one many other great powers have been prone to historically – is premature and generally misguided when it comes to post-war, post-unification and post-Brexit Germany. Despite being the largest, richest and most populous country in Europe, and despite being situated at the centre of Europe and thus affected by most developments in Europe, Germany is still somewhat reluctant to take on a leading role in Europe – most notably when it comes to security issues. The reason is that German strategic culture is still highly influenced by the collective remembrance of the Holocaust and the lessons Germany has drawn from it. Thus, the Holocaust nation discourse is still the central 'unwritten constitution' of the Federal Republic of Germany and has so far limited and delayed all attempts to develop a more active Germany within foreign and security policy. Thus, Germany may be on its way to becoming a more active great power, but it is at a slow pace, and it is still far from 'normal'.

Keywords

Germany, Holocaust, strategic culture, *Historikerstreit*, normal state debate

INTRODUCTION

After the British referendum on EU membership on 23 June 2016 – the so-called Brexit, where the leave side won – calls for Germany to take on a leading role in Europe and become a 'normal' great power at long last once again appeared in US, European and German media. Thus, former US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns, who now teaches at the Harvard Kennedy School, argued that with Britain leaving the EU, Germany 'will need to provide even greater leadership to keep Europe united and moving forward' (Yardley et al. 2016). The British historian Brendan Simms argued that if a large, deeply integrated European Union is no longer possible, the US and Britain should support the more likely scenario, namely an 'asymmetric union of "core Europe", in which Germany took on the role played by England in the United Kingdom'¹ (Simms 2016). And in the eyes of the German political scientist Wichard Woyke, after Brexit there remains 'no other choice' for Germany but to take on 'a leading role' in Europe (Woyke 2016). Berthold Kohler, publisher of the influential *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), seconded by the ruling Christian Democrats' foreign policy spokesman, Roderich Kiesewetter, has even invited the Germans to think the unthinkable: acquiring nuclear weapons (Kohler 2016) (Fisher 2017). These post-Brexit calls for a stronger German role in the world came amid increased focus on an enhanced German role in balancing Russia after Putin had invaded and subsequently annexed the Crimea and instigated and led a violent uprising in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Thus, when presenting a new defence white paper in 2016 Germany's defence minister Ursula von der Leyen stated, '[W]e are ready to lead' (Bundesregierung 2016). In an article in *Foreign Affairs* published after Brexit Germany's then foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier even talked of 'Germany's New Global Role'² (Steinmeier 2016). And after the election of Donald Trump as the new US president on 9 November 2016 the calls for Germany to take on a leading role were repeated once again. After meeting Donald Trump several times, and being somewhat unsettled, especially over Trump's unwillingness to publicly endorse NATO's collective defence doctrine, Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, said that it was time for Europe to pay more attention to its own interests 'and really take our fate into our own hands' (Smale & Erlanger 2016). As *The New York Times* put it, 'An increasingly divided Europe is looking to Germany, its richest power, to cope with its many problems' (Smale & Erlanger 2016). Thus, despite being the leader of a country which historically has been somewhat sceptical of German power, the Danish prime minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, on a visit to Berlin in December 2016 argued that Germany should increase its efforts to lead: 'In the light of the challenges Europe are faced with it would be natural for the biggest country and the largest economy in the EU to take on a stronger position – also in foreign policy' (Jensen 2016). The implication hereof for Danish foreign and security policy and thus for the Danish armed forces is, as Josef Janning, head of the Berlin office of the European Council on Foreign Relations, has argued, that '[t]he old "German question" ... is back' (Janning 2016,

(1) Brendan Simms has furthermore argued that the crisis in Ukraine provides a perfect opportunity to launch a new EU integration project – a 'European (cold) war of unification' (Simms, 2014).

(2) Attempts to further German-French cooperation on deeper EU integration have also been seen between the French and German foreign ministers, Jean-Marc Ayrault and Frank-Walter Steinmeier (FAZ, 2016). The old ideas of an EU Joint Military Command, which the UK used to veto, have also been revived (Erlanger, 2016). And French president Emmanuel Macron has in speeches pushed for a Europe-wide rapid reaction force and a joint European defence budget and policy (Chrisafis & Ranking, 2017).

p. 13) (Economist 2013), though in a different way than we have been used to, one might add. Thus, the anxiety of Germany's smaller neighbours is not so much related to the fear of German power, but rather to the fear of German unwillingness to use its power. In plain text: If the British are out due to Brexit, and the EU, because of Brexit and a general lack of belief in common European solutions, is in a process of stalling, and, finally, Trump and part of the Trump administration find NATO obsolete, and sow doubt about the value of NATO's article five, thus prompting a resurgence of Russian pressure on the smaller European states, then who will protect us from the Russians? Will Germany? And if so, should Denmark follow the example of the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Romania and make efforts to align parts of its armed forces with the German Bundeswehr within NATO structures (Leithäuser 2017) (Clemmensen 2017) rather than stay on its traditional course of a plug-and-play relationship with the British?

There is a sort of *déjà vu* at play here. The arguments behind these calls for an enhanced German posture in the world³ are similar to the arguments that characterised the German debate in the mid-1990s on state normalcy – the so-called *Normalstaatsdebatte* or normal state debate – a long and virulent public debate about how the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) should act in foreign affairs after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the German reunification in 1990. Back then the so-called 'normal state advocates' argued that with reunification Germany was not just a normal state, but also a normal great power of (Western) European size and cut, located at the heart of Europe. This geopolitical position would eventually, German historians and geopolitically minded IR theorists argued, force Germany to let go of its provincial Bonner manners of sleepwalking and cheque book diplomacy and finally recognise that Germany was the dominant power in Europe and should act accordingly. Or as the German historian Hans-Peter Schwarz coined it in 1994, Germany was once again *Die Zentralmacht Europas*, 'Europe's central power' (Schwarz 1994). Thus, one of the main underlying positions of the normal state debate of the 1990s was that a normal state has national interests – not just European or universal interests, as many German politicians from the Bonn period preferred to believe – which it should pursue with all available means, including military force, if necessary. Particularly in the international part of the debate the arguments resembled classical realist and neorealist (structural realist) expectations about balance of power and anarchy, according to which states and great powers especially show common behaviour, not least due to the structural pressures they face in the international system. The renowned IR theorist John Mearsheimer argued that after bipolarity NATO and the EEC would cease to exist and Germany would want to pursue a policy of acquiring nuclear weapons in order to avoid a new balance of power game in the centre of Europe (Mearsheimer 1990).

However, prophecies of a more 'normal' German state behaviour on foreign and security issues – that is, a behaviour that is more focussed and based on power politics, as seen in other historical great powers and hegemonies – are also likely to prove premature this time around (post-Brexit/Trump), just as they did back in the 1990s. The reason being that German strategic culture is still highly affected by the memory of the Holocaust, and it is still not ready to 'go it alone' and take a decisive leading role

(3) For further references, see Burrows & Gnad (2016), Hellmann (2016a), Ash (2016), Fukuyama (2016) and Frankenberger (2017).

in Europe, especially when it comes to hard security issues. Germany's collective self-understanding is thus essentially held in place by the Holocaust Nation discourse (Giesen 1993) and framed within two concepts or historical lessons from the Second World War: 'Never again war' and 'Never again Auschwitz'.⁴

This report presents three main points. The first point, which is mainly theoretical, argues that no state has an a priori fixed 'normal' behaviour determined only by the state's relative power compared to the other powers in the international system. Because while states largely are exposed to the same pressures from the international system – depending on their size, internal cohesiveness, domestic composition, geographical position etc. – states do not necessarily respond to these pressures in the same manner. Rather, states act according to the logic of their own self-understanding – or the state elite's collective self-understanding⁵ – which in turn is influenced, among other things, by the state's and the elite's collective recollection of the past (Berger 2012) (Desch 1998).

The second point, which is partly theoretical, partly empirical, is that Germany's strategic culture – and possibly other countries' as well – is not formed only by a small bureaucratic elite in the foreign policy and security policy circles, even though these of course have a lot to say. Rather, strategic culture, it is here contended, should be seen as a sort of ever-changing 'end product' of a funnel process – wide at the top, narrow at the bottom. At the top of the funnel, in Germany's case, is a wide and very long and rather virulent public debate on how Germany sees itself, its 'vision of itself'. This debate is first and foremost formed by the memory of the Third Reich and the Holocaust and a collective understanding of what led to it and what the German public and political elite agree to have learned from it. The debate was formed over many years through different public discussions by historians, philosophers, political scientists, journalists, bureaucrats and politicians. This wide understanding of what Germany is and how it should behave internally as well as externally functions as the funnel through which politicians and bureaucratic elites shape the more narrowly defined strategic culture of the country and the political actions taken on behalf of and within the limits of it.

The third and main point is empirical. The hypothesis put forward here is that some things, but not many, have changed since the normal state debate of the 1990s. The German public debates about Germany's role in Europe and the world, particularly with regard to German leadership and the use of military force, remain highly bound to the Holocaust Nation discourse (Giesen 1993, p. 242). Even if the understanding of this discourse has changed.

(4) Sometimes, Germany is also held back by its neighbours pulling the 'Nazi card'. Thus, the financial crisis in Europe triggered calls for an enhanced German role in securing the European (and German) banks which had lent vast sums to especially Greek banks. However, when Germany took a leading role and favoured severe austerity measures, the Greek government was quick to pull the 'Nazi card', claiming that Merkel was trying to do with Euros what Hitler had failed to do with tanks (Kühn & Volpe, 2017, p. 105).

(5) Here, I write collective remembrance in the singular. In reality, there are several, always changing, competing collective remembrances, built on ever-changing discursive systems. The same could be said of collective remembrance of the past.

The report proceeds in six main sections. The first section establishes the theoretical and methodological framework chosen: namely strategic culture. The second section examines the German Holocaust Nation discourse in the post-war period, while the third section looks at the *Historikerstreit* – the German historians' controversy – in 1986-1987. The fourth section outlines the 1990s' calls for Germany to become a normal state, knit together in the so-called normal state debate of the mid-1990s. The fifth section goes through the debate on the NATO-led intervention in Kosovo in 1999, the debate on participation in the US-led war in Afghanistan from 2001 onwards, the debate over abstention from the US-led war in Iraq in 2003 and finally the debate on the NATO-led intervention in Libya in 2011. Finally, the sixth section studies the Gauck-von der Leyen-Steinmeier-initiated debate in 2013-2014 on a possible increased German military role in the world as well as the debate on the war in Ukraine. Debates that fell after the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s and the normal state debate in the mid-1990s are analysed with a focus on changes in the strategic culture, in the understanding of the Holocaust and in Germany's historical lesson that could precipitate a more activist (or normal) German foreign policy.⁶

STRATEGIC CULTURE AND FOREIGN POLICY

In 1993 the father of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz, took a bird's eye view of Germany and prophesied that with the demise of the Soviet threat 'NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are', and 'once the new Germany finds its feet, it will no more want to be constrained by the United States acting through NATO than by any other state' (Waltz 1993, p. 76). More than a quarter of a century after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, NATO is still here, and Germany has not shed the US hegemony. Why is that? Well, neorealist logic suggests that we are dealing with an anomaly: 'For a country to choose not to become a great power is a structural anomaly. For that reason, the choice is a difficult one to sustain. Sooner or later, usually sooner, the international status of countries has risen in step with their material resources. Countries with great-power economies have become great powers, whether or not reluctantly' (Waltz 1993, p. 66). Instead, Germany has shown a marked degree of moderation and continuity in its foreign and security policy in the years following reunification. It has shown considerable restraint and continued its cooperative approaches to security and its great reliance on international institutions and organisations. It has exploited the so-called 'peace dividend' in order to lower its military capabilities to an absolute minimum, it has done its utmost to emphasise non-military means whenever possible, and it has shown no real interest in acquiring nuclear weapons.

Historically, declining powers have been slow to accept the smaller role in the world they are given by events. On the other hand, 'rising states have not infrequently failed to expand their external involvements in step with increases in the relative national power' (Duffield 1999, p. 768). How can this inertia be explained? Over the years scholars in foreign and security policy have introduced a plethora of cultural variables, searching for explanations for what would otherwise be deemed 'anomalies' by neorealism.

(6) Thus, I have here chosen only to look at a few of the many significant public debates that have raged over the years in post-unification Germany. Among the important ones from the reunited Germany that have been left out in this report are: the (re)unification debate; the debate on Botho Strauss and the new right; the Goldhagen debate; the Holocaust Mahnmal debate; the Walzer-Bubis debate. For an analysis of these and a more in-depth analysis of the *Historikerstreit*, the normal state debate and the debate on the Berlin Republic, see Staun (2002).

This report tries to add to this plethora of cultural variables by focussing on how remembrance of the past – and especially of difficult aspects of a nation's past – affects its strategic culture.⁷

The view presented here is that states not only respond to pressures from the international political structure; states, and especially great powers, also act according to their own internal logic, here examined through the concept of strategic culture. In 1977 Jack Snyder coined the term 'strategic culture' defined as 'the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other' (Snyder, 1977). Snyder focussed exclusively on nuclear strategic culture, but the concept is not limited hereto. In another classical study Alastair Iain Johnson argues that most proponents of strategic culture would agree that 'elites socialized in different strategic cultures will make different choices when placed in similar situations. Since cultures are attributes of and vary across states, similar strategic realities will be interpreted differently'⁸ (Johnson 1995, p. 35).

In the following strategic culture is not seen as a supplement to realist theory – as an intervening factor, which may explain the deviations from a specific foreign policy course that was supposed to follow overall national interests, but did not due to 'irrational' elements. Rather, it follows the view of Thomas U. Berger, who has argued that cultural beliefs and values act as distinct national lenses, which shape perceptions of events. Thus, 'information that reinforces existing images and beliefs is readily assimilated', whereas information which is inconsistent with the prevailing worldview tends to be 'ignored, rejected or distorted in order to make them compatible with prevailing cognitive structures' (Berger 1998, p. 24). Thus, strategic culture is here essentially seen as the overall worldview of the foreign and security policy elite, which sets the discursive limits of what is deemed meaningful in terms of foreign and security policy. Writing on political culture and state behaviour John S. Duffield has argued that the 'overall effect of culture is to predispose collectivities toward certain actions and policies rather than others. Some options will simply not be imagined. Of those that are contemplated, some are more likely to be rejected as inappropriate, ineffective, or counterproductive than others. To be sure, culture is not deterministic. It may not and often does not precisely determine behaviour. But it can significantly narrow the range of actions likely to be adopted in any given set of circumstances' (Duffield 1999, p. 772). Culture sets the standard for meaningful and appropriate behaviour.⁹ Essentially, strategic culture can thus be described as 'a set of shared beliefs and assumptions derived from common experiences

(7) See Berger (2012) for a similar, though distinct approach.

(8) In his study Johnson identifies three generations or successive waves of strategic culture research. He sees Colin Gray and David Jones as the main proponents of the first generation, which Snyder initiated. The second wave sees strategic culture as a tool of political hegemony, represented for example by Bradley S. Klein's study on US nuclear strategy (Klein 1988). The third wave, which emerged in the 1990s, focussed its variant of strategic culture studies on explaining deviations from the expected (neo)realist outcome (Johnson, 1995). Johnson's classification has been challenged by authors like Michael Desch, who takes a wider and more non-English speaking view of the debates on strategic culture. He argues that there are three waves of focus on culture in strategic studies, namely the Second World War, the Cold War and the Post-Cold War. Among the Post-Cold War theorists, whom Michael Desch describes as a 'heterogeneous lot', he names authors like Peter J. Katzenstein, Thomas U. Berger, Jeffrey W. Legro, Alastair Iain Johnson and Elizabeth Kier. And the best thing he has to say about these cultural theorists is that 'they are sometimes useful as a supplement to realist theories' (Desch 1998, p. 142).

(9) For references to similar approaches to culture and national security, see Katzenstein (1996, 1997).

and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which influence the appropriated ends and means chosen for achieving security objectives¹⁰ (Glenn 2009, p. 530).

Following Duffield, this report mainly pays attention to the beliefs and values of the German political or foreign and security policy elite, as expressed in the numerous public debates of which Germany is so rich. The German elite is seen as perhaps unusually wide due to the entrenched democratic nature of post-war German politics and perhaps extraordinarily interested in foreign and security policy (Schmitt 2012, p. 64). Furthermore, there is a strict parliamentary prerogative on all armed military deployments outside the NATO area, institutionalised in the 2005 *Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz*, the law on the rights and duties of the German parliament on mandating the use of German military in international missions abroad (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz 2005). This law essentially means that parliamentary debates – and public debates – have a large say on German foreign and security policy, and that change does not come easy.¹¹ As Julian Junk and Christopher Daase argue, this ‘complex web of checks and balances in German decision-making on foreign and security policy ... results in a constant consensus-finding exercise’ (Junk & Daase 2013, p. 144), which limits or slows down all attempts to create change. Elisabeth Pond even argues that German foreign policy has become increasingly responsive to domestic pressures, in fact ‘German politicians are now constrained by public opinion in ways that are different from the past’ (Pond & Kundnani 2015).

Another point: I here follow the path of Piotr Buras and Kerry Longhurst who in 2004 argued that Germany’s strategic culture was being shaped by the ‘undercurrents of intellectual and political change apparent in Germany, synonymous with the notion of the “Berlin Republic”’ (Buras & Longhurst, 2004). This investigation is not limited to the debate on the so-called Berlin Republic, but investigates a set of the most important public debates on the future of German statehood, identity and foreign and security policy, notably the *Historikerstreit* and the normal state debate, which are seen as the founding debates.¹² I then study the debates on Germany’s participation or non-participation in the wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya after which I put emphasis on the renewed push by the German

(10) A study by the Bundeswehr Institute of Social Sciences (SOWI) defines strategic culture as ‘a number of shared beliefs, norms and ideas within a given society that generate specific expectations about the respective community’s preferences and actions in security and defence policy’ (Hyde-Price, 2015, p. 605). See also Schmitt (2012, p. 65).

(11) Julian Junk and Christopher Daase add German public opinion and the German constitutional court as two more factors, apart from the parliament, which ‘tame’ the German government in decision on military deployment abroad (Junk & Daase, 2013).

(12) The main organising criteria for characterising a debate as a ‘debate’ is that the participants themselves or external observers refer to the exchanges as part of a ‘debate’. It is thus essentially a self-referential system of meaning, which aims to summarise the preceding discussions and views and considerations expressed in a common concept, such as *Historikerstreit*. The emphasis is therefore on criteria like internal referencing, understood as footnotes and references to previously published articles, references to common authors, reactions to the speeches, references to nodal points, common concepts etc. The term ‘nodal point’ is taken from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* from 1985 define the term as a ‘privileged discursive point’ with ‘partial fixation’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 112) – a keyword or an underlying, perhaps unspoken, mutual understanding of what the debate is all about. For more on the criteria of ‘debates’, see Staun (2002, pp. 84-85), Wæver (1992), Laclau & Mouffe (1985). For more on ex-post credential basis, see Isensee (1995, p. 82). For a view on the concept of tradition as contained in ‘the brief references, the short assertions, the accumulating textbooks, the obligatory footnotes’, see Walker (1993, p. 44).

government in 2013-2016 for an enhanced German role in foreign and security policy and the debate on how to handle the Ukraine crisis. In all of these debates I focus on how the participants in the debates have used history, notably the two main nodal points of the Holocaust Nation discourse, namely 'Never again war' and 'Never again Holocaust', and try to determine how these positions are used in the debate. Thus, the method of this report is informed by discourse analysis. It is argued here that discourses on foreign policy organise knowledge systematically and delimit what can meaningfully be said and what cannot. These discourses set the frame or the limits of what is considered politically feasible policy directions (Wæver 2005). Furthermore, a discourse that has structured political behaviour for some time will result in a behavioural pattern that is difficult to change (but can be changed). Discourses are therefore seen as structurally layered, where the more sedimented discourses are institutionalised and thus more difficult to rearticulate (or politicise) and change (Wæver 2005) (Bertramsen, Thomsen & Torfing 1991, p. 30) (Phillipsen 2012).

The view taken here is therefore that (Germany's) strategic culture is a sort of 'end product' of a funnel process,¹³ which, both in terms of participants and discourses, is wide at the top, where the country's self-understanding, its 'role in the world' – or, as Kissinger terms it, its 'vision of itself' (Kissinger 1967, p. 146) – is formed through a range of public debates on different topics, in Germany's case often debates related to the issue of German identity and the Holocaust. At the bottom of the funnel is Germany's strategic culture, which is much more narrow in terms of participants (mostly top bureaucrats and top politicians) as well as discourses (more focussed on security, less on identity). This line of reasoning follows a philosophical position of Wittgenstein's so-called private language argument (Wittgenstein 1953, pp. §§ 243-313) and implies a view in which the concepts and words we use are learned, socially propagated, something we have 'inherited' from our parents, our upbringing and our schooling, and something we are constantly being fed from the media, society and our interrelations with other people. And since language is not our own, but a collective phenomenon, these public debates form the general understanding of the content of the central concepts and discourses used in these debates, and they therefore also affect a country's strategic culture. They do this because the narrower foreign policy and security policy elites communicate with the same concepts, metaphors and discourses as the general public.

I have for mainly practical reasons chosen not to divide the interventions in the public debates into analytical categories such as 'elite', 'bureaucratic elite' or 'electorate'. I also refrain from trying to differentiate between hidden motives or vested interests behind politicians' use of specific discourses to specific audiences. Not to say that politicians do not use language instrumentally – they most certainly do – but it is a very difficult and essentially normative task to determine when a speech actor (Austin 1962) uses a discourse in an instrumental way and when it is used in a 'genuine' way. Neither do I try to distinguish between official discourses employed for internal audiences versus external, or foreign, audiences.¹⁴

(13) I owe the funnel metaphor to my dear colleague, Dorthe Nyemann.

(14) See Ieva Berzina (2015) for a rather successful attempt at exactly that.

An important point that must be made here at the outset is that I do not underestimate the value of studies on German foreign and security policy, taking for example an IR-neoliberalist view or an IR-classical realist view on Germany's behaviour. And I fully acknowledge the point made by one of my (to me unknown) reviewers that in some of the case studies I have chosen to look into – for example the German choice not to participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 – one can find convincing arguments based on strategic reasoning rather than on what is this report's focus, namely how the memory of the Holocaust affects Germany's strategic culture and the foreign and security policy that follows. Thus, in the Iraq case there were sound international legal, strategic as well as national interest-based arguments for not joining the US-led coalition. To mention a few: the weak case made by the US that the regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction; the supposed link between the regime of Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda; and the lack of a plan for administration of, if not rebuilding, Iraq in the post-war period. However, I do think that it can be argued – at least that is what I will try to do in the following – that Germany's strategic culture and the dominants of the Holocaust Nation discourse influenced the way this German abstention was played out.

Concepts do change. Sometimes change is slow, very slow. This is true of the German Holocaust Nation discourse, which has had a firm grip on German political life since the end of the Second World War and really only been amended slightly with regard to what Germany is supposed to have learned from the Holocaust, not the question of overall responsibility. Sometimes change is sudden, often, but not always, due to a crisis or perceived crisis. One such crisis, which may have the potential to cause marked change in the German political landscape due to its long-term repercussions, is the European fiscal crisis, which erupted in 2010 and threatened the overall stability of the Euro. Also the refugee crisis, which swept through Europe in the summer of 2015 and strengthened the *enfant terrible* of German politics, the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) (Alternatives for Germany), is worth following. Thus, the AfD received 12.6 % of the votes at the general elections in 2017 and for the first time was elected to the federal parliament. Neither of these debates are studied here, though, as they are believed to be too far from the main subject of Germany's strategic culture. However, if the thesis of strategic culture as a funnel process is correct, these two debates and the ones that will undoubtedly follow the AfD's admission into parliament may have an impact on Germany's self-understanding and thus on its strategic culture in the long run – but I will not look into that in this report.

One last point before we proceed: The funnel process metaphor has a methodical implication for the report, since it essentially implies that one has to start with a rather wide examination of the public debates on Germany's self-understanding before narrowing the search down to the present shape of Germany's strategic culture. And Germany's post-war self-understanding is essentially formed by the Holocaust Nation discourse (Giesen 1993), which therefore is the place where we will start our investigation.

THE POST-WAR BASIC CONSENSUS: FROM SONDERWEG TO NORMALITY

It took almost twenty years after the defeat in the Second World War before German historians seriously started addressing the relationship between Nazism, anti-Semitism and German national identity. The most remarkable thing about the post-war period until the 1960s is the 'almost complete silence' about anti-Semitism and the murder of the European Jews, Israeli historian Otto Dov Kulka argues (Kulka 1985, p. 609). When historians in this period considered the question of guilt, they mainly focussed on who was responsible for Hitler's takeover in 1933.¹⁵ And that responsibility was put on the circle around Hitler, the SS, the Gestapo and the special Einsatzgruppen, whereas the officers in the Wehrmacht were set free; they were only following orders and doing their duty as good and faithful soldiers.¹⁶ The FRG had, with its admission into NATO, an urgent need for re-establishing its own military forces as well as the old officer corps. Integration into Western structures and the establishment of a stable Western-style democracy were thus given priority over a public remembrance that could have put the fledgling democracy in trouble among its own people. According to the historian and philosopher Hermann Lübke, this was both right and necessary, since the new democratic government under chancellor Konrad Adenauer had to arrange itself with the majority of the population who a few years earlier had supported the Nazi state (Lammers 1992, p. 234) (Lammers & Stræde, 1987, pp. 110-111).

However, beginning in the early 1960s a shift in the remembrance of the Holocaust took place in German public life. Inspiration for this shift came not least from the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 and from the publication of the Jewish-German philosopher Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Report on the banality of Evil* in 1963 (Arendt 1999). The German edition of the book came out in 1964, incidentally the same year as the resumption of the Auschwitz processes in Frankfurt am Main.

From then on – and especially after the student revolt in 1968 – the Third Reich was no longer regarded as an unfortunate parenthesis in German national history, but as the high point, the very culmination of Germany's national romantic tradition (Kulka 1985) (König 1996) (Pohl 1997). However, already in Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht* from 1961 the main culprits were identified as the Prussian aristocracy and the anti-democratic and militarist ideology that had kept Germany in a semi-feudal structure and prevented democratisation, which Germany as the only country in (Western) Europe had not obtained after industrialisation. The only way to avoid a return to the anti-Western and anti-democratic German *Sonderweg* was – as Karl Jaspers had advised in *Die Schuldfrage* from 1946 (Jaspers

(15) The significance of anti-Semitism for the national socialist ideology was at the time considered little more than a convenient and effective demagogic tool – not as the *raison d'être* for national socialism (Kulka, 1985, p. 610). Thus, the dominant German understanding of the period up to the early 1960s was the view that Alan Bullock outlined in *A Study in Tyranny* from 1952, where Hitler was portrayed as the epitome of the unprincipled tyrant whose will to power was the only guiding principle for the national socialists, and anti-Semitism was viewed as one means among many to achieve this goal (Kulka, 1985, p. 614).

(16) This understanding of the role of the Wehrmacht continued more or less until the mid-1990s, when the traveling exhibition 'Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944' from the Hamburger Institut für Social Forschung opened on 5 March 1995 and initiated a large debate on the role of the Wehrmacht. The exhibition continued until 1999 and was shown in 34 cities around Germany, Austria and Switzerland. It was subsequently rearranged and shown for another period from 2001 to 2004.

1946) – to ensure German *Einbindung* (or deep integration) in Western democratic institutions. Leaning on Hans-Peter Schwarz (1994), who argued that Germany had gone from *Machtbessenheit* to *Machtvergessenheit* (from being obsessed with power to painstakingly forgetting it), one could argue that the Germans had also gone from *Nationsbessenheit* to *Nationsvergessenheit*, that is, from being obsessed with the nation to forgetting it completely. And at some point during the 1970s the German academic understanding of history was largely denationalised. The decade saw the development of a consensual thesis of the development of the German nation state and, in particular, the development of German nationalism as a *Sonderweg*, a special German development path, which was not understood positively – as in Thomas Mann – but negatively, leading straight to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. This developed into a ‘basic consensus’ in the FRG (Lammers & Stræde, 1987, p. 109).¹⁷

Alongside the debate on what caused the Holocaust – and intertwined herewith – was a debate on German ‘normalcy’. After a Soviet proposal on 7 June 1955 on the ‘normalisation’ of diplomatic relations with the FRG, chancellor Konrad Adenauer during a visit to Moscow in 1955 insisted that the division of Germany was ‘abnormal’. Thus, for Adenauer, only the end of the division of the two German countries could lead to ‘normalisation’. However, over time the division of the two German countries changed the meaning of the concept. In 1961 a Bundestag resolution based on a report by the Sudeten German social democrat Wenzel Jaksch required the federal government ‘to seize every available opportunity ... to achieve a normalisation of relations between the Federal Republic and the East European states’ (Ash, 1993, p. 15), and in the early 1970s ‘normalisation’ was at the heart of the social-liberal *Ostpolitik*. Thus, foreign minister Walter Scheel (FDP) described the *Ostpolitik* as ‘nothing but the attempt at a political normalization based on the realities that we find here and now’ (Ash, 1993, p. 15). Here ‘normalisation’ means improving the relationship between the FRG and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), but at the same time it confirms the split between the two states. This position also resounds in Helmut Schmidt’s state of the nation address in 1978, where he suggested that the goal for the relationship between the FRG and the GDR should be that ‘gradually a situation of matter-of-course normality should be achieved, such as has so far been achieved for example in our relationship with the Polish People’s Republic’ (Schmidt in Ash, 1993, p. 16). During the 1980s the concept of normalisation again changed, this time aimed more broadly at European conditions. The slogan of virtually all West German politicians was that they wanted to change the importance of borders, not their location; the borders should be more permeable, ‘normalising’ the transition between East and West (Ash, 1993, p. 16).

(17) The precise time when this ‘basic consensus’ achieved a hegemonic position in West German political self-understanding obviously depends on how you define ‘basic consensus’ and what the term contains. Martin Brozat argues that already from the late 1950s there had been an element of political orientation (*Gesittung*) towards the Holocaust in West German self-understanding, including a specific self-critical view of history (Brozat in Historikerstreit, 1988, p. 195). Habermas instead considers the early 1980s to be the time when this understanding had become widespread in West German public awareness (Habermas, 1987, p. 137). Also Jarausch sets the timeframe to the early 1980s (Jarausch, 1995, p. 574), whereas Dieter Pohl operates with a marked shift between the late 1970s and early 1980s (Pohl, 1997). Rainer Zitelmann argues in turn that this understanding of history was of a leftist cut, and that the left in the 1970s and 1980s had achieved a ‘cultural hegemony’ in the FRG intellectual discourse (Zitelmann in Weidenfeld, 1993; here quoted from Gensicke in Estel & Mayer, 1994, p. 198). Here I mainly follow Kulka (1985), Pohl (1997) and Mommsen (in Weidenfeld, 1983).

In 1983 Wolfgang Mommsen thus argued that the German question had been moved back to the historical *Normallage* (normal situation), understood as 'a German cultural nation in the middle of Europe, which is split into several German nation states.' 'The phase of the common nation state from 1871-1933 was an episode in German history, and now we again, this time at a higher level, have reached the state which existed in Germany after 1815, namely that of a plurality of German states with a common cultural national affiliation' (Mommsen in Habermas, 1990, p. 207). Thus, the dichotomy *Sonderweg*-normality let the united German nation state fall on the *Sonderweg* side, while the idea of a German universalist cultural nation in the middle of Europe, split into several states, was considered normal. In their own understanding the Germans had learned from history, evolved and become post-national. But then came the *Historikerstreit*.

HISTORIKERSTREIT – THE HISTORIANS' CONTROVERSY

The *Historikerstreit*¹⁸ – the German Historians' Controversy – is peculiar in many ways. It was not just historians who participated, but also a lot of non-historians, including the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the publisher of *Der Spiegel*, Rudolf Augstein, *Die Zeit's* assistant chief editor, Robert Leicht, the co-publisher of FAZ, Joachim Fest, among many others. Habermas is usually considered the 'trigger' of the *Historikerstreit*, as he in the intellectual weekly *Die Zeit* on 11 July 1986 wrote an article 'responding' to what he saw as recent years' attempts by national-conservative historians – among them, Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrand and Michael Stürmer – not only to historicise and relativise the Nazi crimes, but also to downplay and excuse them.¹⁹ The heart of the debacle was not just how Nazism and the Holocaust should be understood, but what place this remembrance should be awarded in interpretations of the German past. Because the past, or rather the understanding and memory of the past, was crucial to the future, it was argued. If Nazism and the Holocaust should be understood as distinctive German phenomena, one would not be able to 'reprocess', 'work through' or 'normalise' history, meaning that the horrors of the Holocaust would remain history's burden on the German nation for all times. However, if one could compare the Holocaust to other genocides – for the conservative historians first and foremost the Stalinist genocide – the Holocaust could be historicised and thus relativised as one genocide among others, thus freeing the German nation from the destiny of 'having for all eternity to bend its neck in guilt' and making it quite legitimate to seek to recreate a

(18) The following account is based on a collection of opinion pieces, '*Historikerstreit*' - *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (1988). It should be noted that the first letter to the editor from Andreas Hillgruber in FAZ on 23 August 1986 is not included in the collection.

(19) See Øhrgaard (1991, p. 101), Lammers & Stræde (1987, p. 104), Nipperdey in *Historikerstreit* (1988, pp. 215-219). Hillgruber also considered Habermas the one who had triggered the debate. However, Hillgruber argued that the debate began on 2 July 1986, when Habermas during a public hearing organised by Freimut Duve (SPD) on the design of Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin 'ostentatiously' should have held up Hillgruber's *Zweierlei Untergang* proclaiming, 'this book is a scandal!' (Hillgruber in *Historikerstreit*, 1988, p. 333). My former colleague, Henning Duus, is strongly critical of this reading of *Historikerstreit* as being triggered by Habermas. Also Hans (Wehler, 1988)-Ulrich Wehler is critical of the notion of Habermas as the initiator of the debate, since he believes that the contributions to the debate, to which Habermas responded, in themselves were of such a nature that they had 'infestation primate', meaning that Habermas had to react to them (Wehler, 1988, p. 12). For a different view, namely that Ernst Nolte triggered the debate, see Matthias Matthijs (2016, p. 137).

German national identity feeling. Therefore, the key element debated in the *Historikerstreit* was – in addition to the cause of the Holocaust – the question of national identity. In essence, the *Historikerstreit* was a struggle between two overall understandings of state and nation, between Kantian patriotism and political romanticism (Staun 2002).

The conservative side wanted to relativise the Holocaust, so that the West Germans would be able to identify positively with their country's history and thereby come to love it again. Because according to the conservatives, a national community could (and can) not merely be built on an idea of reason based on *Wirtschaftswunder* (materialism), post-nationality and constitutional patriotism.²⁰ Thus, Michael Stürmer sought to 'normalise' history (Stürmer in *Historikerstreit*, 1988, p. 36). In his opinion, '[p]luralism of values and interests, will, when it can no longer find a common ground, no longer be mitigated by growth, no longer dampened by debt, sooner or later lead towards social civil war, like at the end of the Weimar Republic' (Stürmer in Weidenfeld, 1993, p. 77). Something more is needed to hold the community together in times of trouble: emotions, love for the community. And this soon. For as Stürmer argued, Hitler came to power via a 'secularized, from upheaval to upheaval rushing civilization whose characteristics were loss of orientation and a futile quest for security' (Stürmer in *Historikerstreit*, 1988, pp.36-37). And if a country is unable to find common ground, it runs the risk of repeating history.

The common interpretation of the result of the *Historikerstreit* is that the Habermas wing 'won' the debate. The Holocaust was thus understood as a specifically German historical phenomenon that could not be compared to other genocides or at least only to a very limited extent be subjected to comparison: The Holocaust was thus unique (*Einzigartig*). The wish of Nolte, Hillgruber and Stürmer for a 'normalisation' of history and the desire once again to 'be able to stand up straight' was exercised. The result was that any attempt to reintroduce the concepts of power, state and national interests as natural parts of German political and historical thinking was interpreted as a right-wing and national romantic attempt to once again lure the Germans along the forbidden tracks of the romantic power state (*Machtstaat*) – a path that would necessarily lead directly to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Thus, Bernhard Giesen's concept of Holocaust Nation (Giesen, 1993) was clearly strengthened during the debate.

THE NORMAL STATE DEBATE

A central theme in the normal state debate – which raged from the time of the reunification of Germany in 1990 to 1995, when the debate on the Berlin Republic took over (Staun 2002, p. 444) – was the idea that Germany after reunification had returned to normality, as opposed to the post-war division of Germany in two separate states, namely the GDR and the FRG, which from this point on was seen as a *Sonderweg*. Implicit in this notion was the idea that the nation state is the normal societal unit in world

(20) The concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus*, or constitutional patriotism, originates from Dolf Sternberger, a student of Karl Jaspers, but was popularised by Jürgen Habermas (albeit in Habermas' own version). See Sternberger (1990) and Habermas (1998).

history.²¹ Furthermore, there was the growing post-festum propagation of the notion that the Germans might have been divided into two states, but as a cultural nation, as a culturally defined people, they had never ceased to belong together. As the CDU politician Kurt Biedenkopf put it:

[T]he nation was never divided. My experience tells me that the state was divided and that there was a state border, which ran through the middle of Germany, after we had brought ourselves to recognize the other German state as a state. But we never lost the unity of the cultural nation, I believe. (Biedenkopf, 1994, p. 38; here quoted from Staun 2002, p. 448)

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification there was a surge in books and articles with titles similar to Werner Weidenfeld's *Deutschland. Eine Nation – doppelte Geschichte* (Germany. One nation – twofold history) from 1993 in which the reunification of the two German countries is seen as a 'reunion' that *had* to come, sooner or later, because the two countries belonged together naturally. The national romantic family metaphor occupied a pronounced first place in the argument structure: as twins separated at birth, but – with the help of fate – reunited in adulthood, when they would learn that, despite the many years of separation and great differences in upbringing, they were incredibly similar, contrary to what their foster parents had told them over and over again when they were little.²² Thus, the normal state debate broke with the 'basic consensus' of the Bonn Republic.

Another key point in the debate was power. Thus, the normal state advocates argued that the reunited Germany had not only regained its position as a normal state, but – because of its increased territory, population and the size of its economy – it was also a 'normal great power'. A normal great power was here understood as something similar to the UK or France, and there was therefore an implicit element of *Westbindung*, of integration into Western and European structures, in this discourse. Thus, it was the Western world's version of normality that Germany should strive for. And if Germany should be a Western-style normal great power – essentially, if it wanted to remain a part of the West now that it had become a major power – it had to re-establish the connection between political power and military means. So in reality the debate focussed on what kind of foreign and security policy Germany should conduct.

In the normal state debate of the 1990s it was the state, that is, the German nation state, that should or had been 'normalised' as a result of reunification. The participants in the debate were a diverse group, many of them historians.²³ They were not only Germans, just as the debate was not limited to German media outlets, but was also joined by a variety of international academics speaking through all sorts of

(21) Thus, implicit in the notion of normality was also a *kleindeutsche lösung*, that is, a small Germany solution, since Austria was seen as a separate and independent (essentially a non-German) state.

(22) See, for example, Ignatieff (1993), Probst (1996) and Smyser (1995).

(23) Peter Glotz speaks of 'normalisation-nationalists' and a 'normalisation-school' (Glotz, 1994, pp. 23, 58). As part of this group he lists Arnulf Baring, Joachim Fest, Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, Botho Strauss, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Karl Heinz Bohrer and Karlheinz Weissmann. To these he lists leftist critics of the concept of normalisation, including Peter Brandt, Herbert Ammon, Karl Otto Hondrich, Wolfgang Templin and Tilman Fichter. Konrad H. Jarausch adds historians like Christian Maier and Heinrich August Winkler, whom he sees as taking a middle ground position (Jarausch, 1995, p. 581).

international journals, primarily *International Relations*.²⁴ However, the international debate is assumed only to have had limited impact on the German debate (Staun 2002, pp. 84-96).

Another key element of the debate was the Bonn versus Berlin controversy, framed as a dichotomy between provincialism and urbanity (and, implicitly, small state versus great power). One of the debaters who developed or at least played a main part in the development of the concept of provincialism as an integrated characteristic of Bonn and the Bonn Republic was the literary critic and writer Karl Heinz Bohrer. Bohrer did not like provinciality, especially the form of provinciality symbolised by Bonn, the small state mentality of FRG. Bohrer wanted Germany to throw away its mantle of insecurity and fear. He wanted Germany to be willing to take risks and to take on responsibility. Bohrer described the Bonn era as '[a]n escape from world politics into the fairy tale forest, where no one will find us anymore, apart from the good fairy who announces that world peace has broken out' (Bohrer 1990a, p. 1100). In April 1991 Bohrer argued that Germany with its pacifist behaviour during the Gulf War in 1990-1991 essentially broke with the successful 'proficiency test' of the entire post-war era. Thus, Bohrer believed that '[t]he German government does not stand unequivocally by its Western ties' (Bohrer 1991b, p. 349), not due to a rationally weighed policy of sovereignty, but because of the increasing provincialism, which 'instead of a civic cultural and political concreteness has given top priority to the clearly bottomless sentimentality of the strategy of reconciliation and insurance' (Bohrer 1991b, p. 349).

One of the central critics of the normal state advocates and especially of Karl Heinz Bohrer was the German social democrat and public figure Peter Glotz, who saw Bohrer as representing a new German 'intellectual right wing', not stemming from the poor East (Germany), but from the rich West. What Bohrer and the other 'normalisation nationalists' heralded was a 'parting with the Bonn Republic'. This parting would take place in three phases, Glotz prophesied: The first step was rehabilitation of the nation state. Then followed rehabilitation of ethnicity. And as the third step: almost ritualistic confession to the German power state²⁵ (Glotz in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 9 October 1993; here quoted from Glotz, 1994, p. 68).

Another characteristic of the normal state debate was the revival of discourses that focussed on the importance of Germany's location at the centre of Europe, represented by concepts such as *Mitte* (centre), *Mittellage* (central position) and *Mitteleuropa* (Central Europe). A location which, for the

(24) For some contributions to the international part of the normal state debate, see Waltz (1993), Mearsheimer (1990), Ash (1993, 1994), Wallace (1991), Wæver (1989, 1991, 1992), Holm, Larsen, & Wæver (1990) and Wæver in Gottlieb & Jensen (1995).

(25) Glotz's alternative to this 'erroneous normalisation' – which is the title of a booklet of Glotz's articles on the subject from 1991 to 1994 (Glotz 1994) – was a 'new international division of labour' (Glotz 1994, p. 92). Glotz's position was that the Germans – who in the 20th century got tangled up in two dreadful wars and after trying to annihilate an entire people, the Jews – had experienced on 'their own body' what 'disasters the plague of nationalism causes' and thus must have learned from history. This was the reason why the Germans, 'with the "acceptance" of their partners', had pursued and had to keep on pursuing an 'anti-traditional policy', which in Glotz's understanding meant no military action out of area, no war funding, no logistical support to warring parties, only defence of Germany's own region, an active 'peace corps' and large investments in reconstruction and 'ecological stabilization of this endangered world'. Because although it may be hard to go against the flow of old and new nationalism in Europe, Germany – which Glotz, with the help of Helmuth Plessner (1994), designated 'the belated nation' – should have the courage to be different (Glotz 1994, p. 93).

normalisers, along with Germany's increased geographic, demographic and economic size, assigned Germany with a special responsibility for events in Eastern and Central Europe. Here I will go through three of the main proponents of the importance of Germany's 'return to the centre of Europe', namely Arnulf Baring, Hans-Peter Schwarz and Michael Stürmer.²⁶

First, there was a geographical element in the debate. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the end of Soviet dominance in Eastern Europe Germany had moved back into the centre of Europe. However, this geographical element had consequences for German national identity. The conservative historian Arnulf Baring argued that '[u]ntil now we were a purely Western country, now we are again, whether we like it or not, a Central European (mitteleuropäischen) [country]' (Baring 1991, p. 9). Furthermore, moving back into the centre of Europe also entailed a shift from 'provinciality' to 'urbanity', from 'innocence' to 'real life'. Thus, the Bonn era, in the view of Baring, was an 'idyllic phase in our history' (Baring 1991, p. 15), a phase in which Germany 'for decades was not bearing any responsibility for its own destiny', but 'were on vacation' far away from the all-important concerns of the nation (Baring 1991, p. 16). Bonn was a 'small Western state, a handkerchief between the Rhine and Weser' (Baring 1991, p. 23), where politicians played 'hide and seek' and let Germany be an economic giant, but a political dwarf.

In his book *Die Zentralmacht Europas – Deutschlands Rückkehr auf die Weltbühne* from 1994 the conservative historian Hans-Peter Schwarz is critical of the German government's alleged 'harmony dependency' (Schwarz 1994, p. 61), a leftover of the Bonn period. Schwarz is critical of the government's 'provincial incomprehension' (p. 61), the widespread idea of Germany as a 'civilian power', which had made up its mind only to deal in 'doing good' (*Gutestun*), possibly supplemented by 'cheque book contributions for peacekeeping operations', 'unless it smells of powder, in which case it would let its allies have precedence' (Schwarz 1994, p. 177). Furthermore, Schwarz criticised Germany's alleged penchant for legalism, which had made Germany 'full of good ideas but poor in action' (Schwarz 1994, p. 15). In his eyes, Germany was essentially a 'traumatized giant', neither willing nor able to play the role of a 'normal', albeit very large country in the European Concert (Schwarz 1994, p. 20). Instead, politicians wanted to pretend that Germany was just 'a big Switzerland'²⁷ (Schwarz 1994, p. 20).

Another central element of the debate was an urgent need for change in Germany's foreign policy following its return to the centre of Europe. Thus, for Stürmer the end of the Cold War did not mean the 'end of history'. Rather, he argued, it 'initiates its return' (Stürmer 1994, p. 221). Therefore, Germany

(26) Other German historians who shared this view were Hagen Schulze, Eberhard Jäckel, Hartmut Boockmann and Heinz Schilling.

(27) Another central issue in the debate was the inescapability of facts of life which were part and parcel of Germany's return to the centre of Europe. Thus, Stürmer argued that Germany, with its return to the centre of Europe, had always been the 'center of European power, trade and geometry of ideas where all influential lines crossed each other. Geography and history made the country a chessboard in peacetime, battlefield in wartime' (Stürmer, 1994, p. 20). As Baring saw it, this was 'unchangeable, since it is us apriori given by geography' (Baring, 1991, p. 24). Furthermore, for Baring, the position at the centre of Europe brought with it certain risks. For 'whether we like it or not, we are suddenly once again placed in the old coercive situation (Zwangslage) between France and Britain on the one side, Poland and Russia on the other side' (Baring 1991, p. 19). And the German public had to realise this, as they were unable to escape their central location 'in the middle of Europe', just as they could not avoid their 'leading role' in Europe (Stürmer 1994, p. 11).

could no longer play its 'old role in the shadow of the Red Army, the Berlin Wall and Pax Americana'; the 'manuscript is at its end', 'the actors have gone home' (Stürmer 1994, p. 10). What is approaching is no 'champagne breakfast', but rather 'the painful task of contributing to the world's management according to German interests, abilities and experience'. 'The country must, though it thereby loses its world politics innocence, adjust to a role that goes beyond that of civilian power broker working through engineering, credit and foreign trade'²⁸ (Stürmer 1994, p. 10).

However, a change in German foreign policy would not come by itself. In the view of Hans-Peter Schwarz, change was not possible without 'a psychological normalization of Germany' (Schwarz 1994, pp. 178, 16). This lack of 'psychological normalization' Schwarz linked to the widespread lack of common understanding of history. Because – and here we can hear the tones of the *Historikerstreit* – '[a] country that does not know where it comes from, does not know where to go' (Schwarz, 1994, p. 13). Between the lines Schwarz thus argued that the German understanding of history had to be 'normalized', and that it was necessary to downplay this 'mourning of the traumatized giant which long has been the laughing stock of the rest of the world' (Schwarz 1994, p. 20). For Schwarz, normalisation involves a change in the understanding of history – that is, the weakening of the dominance of the Holocaust Nation discourse – as well as a re-establishment of the Clausewitzian link between political power and military means.

To sum up: In the normal state debate the normality metaphor primarily functioned as a discursive position, which saw the nation state as the normal unit of history and Bonn as a special phase in history, and which argued in favour of a return to the Clausewitzian connection between political power and military means. In most cases it was employed as one part of a dichotomous pair with the *Sonderweg* term, arguing that for Germany to continue the Bonn tradition of restrained foreign policy would have been 'abnormal', essentially a *Sonderweg*, a special path of development, which at worst would (some say will) have led Germany away from the West and, if not back to the horrors of the Holocaust, at least to the erroneous policy of pre-First World War Germany. Because of the return of history and the return of 'everyday life', Baring, Schwarz and Stürmer demanded that German politicians ended their 'noble speeches' and 'morally impressive statements'. They had to stop trying to be friends with everyone and learn to choose sides between friend and foe, not least in the 'case of emergency' (*im Ernstfall*), 'in the hour of decision' (*im Entscheidungsfall*). This required determination among statesmen, political leadership, 'braveness' and 'shaping power' (*Kraft der Gestaltung*)²⁹ and the end of 'harmony dependency'. Thus, there seemed to be an undercurrent of Schmitterian decisionism (Schmitt 1996) and an element of realism, including IR realism, as the ontological foundation of the three historians.

(28) Also for Baring, the return to the centre of Europe necessitated a change in Germany's foreign policy. Germany had to break with its tendency to be friends with everyone. It made no sense for the leaders of Germany to pretend that 'everything is equally important, that everything is compatible with everything' (Baring 1991, p. 26). Such statements would simply create a false sense of security among the population, he argued. One must be able to choose sides and establish a prioritised list of national interests. 'Bonn's desperate attempt to buy us free of all problems' (Baring 1991, p. 26) did not work anymore.

(29) The term *Gestaltungsmacht* was to surface again in 2013 in the debate on *Gestaltungsmacht Deutschland* initiated by Gauck, von der Leyen and Steinmeier.

THE BERLIN REPUBLIC AND ITS FOREIGN POLICY

A few years later, on March 24, 1999, German soldiers were engaged in offensive military operations for the first time since the Second World War. German tornado fighter bombers took part in the first wave of air strikes on Serbian military positions in Kosovo. All in all, 15 German aircrafts and hundreds of support troops participated in NATO's Operation Allied Force over the next 78 days. As Stephan Speicher put it in *Berliner Zeitung*, 'the last victim of the fall of the Wall was German pacifism' (Lantis 2002). However, when journalists from the weekly *Der Spiegel* asked Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping how he felt being the first German defence minister to send German troops into real combat since the Second World War, he replied that Germany simply had no other choice: 'The experience of recent years teaches us that Milosevic only can be discouraged from the use of violence and murder by a clear policy including convincing military threats' (Ihlau & Ilsemann 1999). In parliament Scharping had invoked the Holocaust Nation discourse when arguing that Germany had to take part in Operation Allied Force: 'It is a commitment based on the experiences of the first half of this century' (Deutscher Bundestag 1999, p. 2424). And as widely reported in the press, Scharping argued that NATO's intervention was intended to stop an 'incipient genocide' (*Hier beginnt Völkermord*) (Wunsch 2012, p. 282). The German foreign minister and leader of the formerly pacifist party, the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), Joschka Fischer – who, upon taking office, had declared that there would be 'no Green Party foreign policy, only German foreign policy' – faced strong opposition in his own party. During the mid-1990s Joschka Fischer had changed his traditional anti-militarist and pacifist stand under the influence of the Serb massacres of civilian Bosnians in Srebrenica despite these cities being declared UN-protected safe havens. Fischer belonged to the 1968 generation, who had revolted against their parents' generation and accused it of having allowed the Nazis to commit the Holocaust precisely because they had 'looked the other way'. In the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s he had fought against American 'imperialism' in the streets of Frankfurt (Joffe 1999). In a book from 1994 Fischer, then Green Party leader, had explained his party's support for European integration and German participation in NATO (still a hot issue in the party in the mid-1990s). He had called for a higher degree of German political realism in foreign policy, while still 'maintaining a role as a civilian power and abstaining from the use of military force abroad' (Lantis 2002, p. 39). Furthermore, Fischer warned that Germany's debate on NATO operations 'out of area' could be a sign of a trajectory which could eventually lead to a 'hegemony of the *Machtstaat Deutschland* (power state Germany) under modern conditions'³⁰ – a situation that had to be avoided (Fischer 1994, pp. 229-230). However, in July 1995, after the Serb massacres in Srebrenica, Fischer found himself in a similar dilemma as his parents' generation. In a widely published letter addressed to the Green Party Fischer made a passionate defence for German participation in an international military intervention in order to stop Serbian aggression: 'Can pacifists, can a position on nonviolence simply take in the victory of brutal, naked force in Bosnia? What to do, when all means used so far – embargo, protected zones, control of heavy weapons, negotiated settlements – simply fails or at least in the face of military violence works unsatisfactory' (Fischer 1995, p. 8). The conviction that Milosevic would

(30) In July 1994 the German Constitutional Court announced in a court ruling that Article 24 of the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) allowed German participation in international military operations outside the NATO area, if the government could secure a simple majority in parliament (Whitney, 1994) (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2003, p. 103).

only bow to overwhelming force and that the policy of his regime threatened the peace in Europe was also central in Fischer's speech in the Bundestag before voting on Germany's possible participation in NATO's 1999 air campaign in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Operation Allied Force, which took place without a mandate from the UN Security Council.³¹ Thus, Fischer first underlined that it was an 'emergency situation' and a 'special case' which would not set a precedent for NATO to start handing out mandates to itself. The UN covenant and the Security Council's monopoly on violence would still apply, he said. However, most importantly for our purpose, Fischer paved the way for German participation in the war by referring to the lessons Germany should have learned from the past: 'If we have learned the lesson from our history and from the murderous first half of the 20th century, there can in Europe no longer be warmongering' (Deutscher Bundestag 1998, p. 23142). And in preventing this, 'the reunited Germany has a special responsibility' (along with the other EU member states and the US), Fischer argued (Deutscher Bundestag 1998, p. 23142). Despite Germany's traditional 'United Nations reflex' and reluctance to use military force, the German Bundestag supported sending German troops to war in Yugoslavia with 503 out of 584 parliamentarians voting in favour, 63 against and 18 abstaining (Brunner 2012). Still, the Green Party was very close to collapsing at a special congress held in Bielefeld a few months later, where the party members fell into a vivid debate between so-called 'Fundis' (fundamentalists) and 'Realos' (realists) under which Joschka Fischer was attacked with a paint bomb that punctured his eardrum and left him splattered with red paint. Undeterred, he continued his speech: "Peace," he thundered, "means that men aren't murdered, women aren't raped and people aren't driven from their homes" (Joffe 1999). Furthermore, he argued that 'Auschwitz is incomparable. But I stand on two principles, never again war, never again Auschwitz, never again genocide, never again fascism' (Der Spiegel 1999) (Vied 2010). In the end the party members decided to endorse the leadership's course (444 in favour; 318 against) (Harnisch 2001, p. 60). In a subsequent interview Fischer recalled his last conversation with the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, in Belgrade, just before NATO unleashed its bombers on March 24, 1999: "I am ready to walk on corpses, and the West is not," the Serbian strongman said. "This is why I shall win." (Joffe 1999). Milosevic's cynical arrogance, Fischer later stated, convinced him right then that the bombs had to fly.

In essence, Scharping and Fischer, in order to legitimate Germany's active participation in the Kosovo campaign, argued that the ethnic cleansing under way in Yugoslavia was comparable to the atrocities of the Third Reich – even though Fischer publicly had to say that the Holocaust was incomparable – thereby implicitly adopting the same position as the one the conservative historians fought for in the *Historikerstreit*: that the Nazi Holocaust could be compared to other genocides. 'The evils of Nazism, although unique in terms and scale and viciousness, were not uniquely German. Other countries as well committed similar crimes' (Berger 2012, pp. 76-77). Furthermore, they adopted the understanding that because Germany had learned from history, it had a special responsibility to help stop the killings in Kosovo. 'Never again Auschwitz' had trumped 'Never again war'.

(31) UNSCR 1199 did state that the situation in Kosovo constituted a 'threat to peace and security in the region' and referred to chapter VII of the UN Covenant, but did not authorise military intervention (UNSCR, 1998b) (Güntelberg, 2014, p. 76).

Germany's course towards an enhanced foreign and security policy activism took another step forwards in 2001. After the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York on September 11, 2001 Germany pledged 'unlimited solidarity' with the US. Chancellor Schröder's pledge was backed by all parties, except the left wing PDS. Germany also supported the invocation of NATO's Article 5, its collective defence mechanism. However, the German public and elite had some reservations regarding the use of force. Public reticence focussed on the fear that the US might overreact, unilaterally escalating the conflict in the wider Middle East (Buras & Longhurst 2004, pp. 231-232). While no party would publicly question the US's right to pursue al-Qaeda, there was no great enthusiasm among Green Party members to see German troops in what was deemed a risky military campaign. Thus, getting the Bundestag to mandate German participation in the Afghanistan endeavour was not easy. This was another first: It was the first time since the Second World War that German ground forces were to take part in direct combat missions – albeit in small numbers, approximately 100 special forces; the rest would be part of Operation Enduring Freedom, which, at least in the beginning, was considered a more traditional peace-keeping operation in a relatively peaceful area. In order to secure a majority, the Schröder government had to turn the vote on making the altogether 3,900 Bundeswehr troops available for action in Afghanistan in the US-led war against terror on November 16, 2001 into a vote of confidence, a measure used only twice before in the history of the FRG. The government only survived on a small margin of 10 votes, though, with 336 voting for and 326 against (where four members of the government party, the Green Party, voted against and four in favour in order to nullify the effects of the internal party protest). It was clear that Germany was far from united over the war in Afghanistan (Buras & Longhurst 2004, p. 234), and in reality the German parliament came fairly close to preventing the new push in foreign and security policy activism.

Despite the initial problems, Germany acted as a reliable partner in NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan from the onset in 2002, deployed in the more peaceful Northern part of Afghanistan. In order to limit casualties the deployment was 'ring-fenced with "caveats"', which allegedly provoked a British officer to describe the Bundeswehr as 'an aggressive camping organization' (Borger 2012). Indeed, Germany's performance in Afghanistan was deemed 'lacklustre' by its Western allies (Hyde-Price 2015, p. 601). But as the security situation in Northern Afghanistan deteriorated, the German foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, chose to free the Bundeswehr of its many caveats and formally classify the war in Afghanistan as an 'armed conflict under international law', thus opening up for a more active German participation. As the director of foreign policy and defence at the Centre for European Reform, Tomas Valasek, argued, 'Germany has gone from a special case to a normal military. It used to be an outlier. Now it is still one of the more reluctant countries in Europe to deploy force, but it's no longer off the charts' (Borger 2012). In her study on German strategic culture and the deployment in Afghanistan Carolin Hilbert argued that 'overall' the FRG preferred civilian to military means, and that it was 'very reluctant' to use genuine force or assume a leadership role in international security policy; however, 'if need be, Germany can go all the way': 'battle an insurgency', 'participate in offensive operations' and 'protect its interests with military force' (Hilbert 2014). Still, a main question was coming to the fore, namely how solid these changes in German strategic culture really were. Thus, after a 2009 air strike which went awfully wrong and where at least 100 Afghans

were killed, mostly civilians, Dirk Kurbjuweit argued: 'If a patrol had been sent, the soldiers would have seen that the trucks were stuck in the mud and no longer posed a threat, and they would also have seen that the people surrounding the trucks were harmless villagers and not combatants. But that would have meant risking German lives, which Colonel Klein didn't want to do' (Borger 2012). A poll by Deutschlandtrend in May 2010 showed that 70 % of the German public demanded a quick withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan (Junk & Daase 2013, p. 148). And as a direct consequence of the failed air strike, Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung had to resign. Germany could go to war, but if it cost (too many) civilian lives, the German public would not accept it. Furthermore, in late May 2010 German President Horst Koehler had to resign after a virulent public debate on remarks he had made in Deutschland Radio, the public broadcasting station, during a visit to Afghanistan. Koehler set off a barrage of criticism when he said that the German soldiers serving in Afghanistan and other missions abroad were really defending German economic interests (Dempsey 2010).

German war scepticism only grew as the Bush administration's war on terror turned towards 'rogue states' in the 'axis of evil', including Iraq, Iran and North Korea. And it became more and more entrenched as the US argued for war on Iraq followed by a regime change on the grounds that Iraq's Saddam Hussein supported terror (al-Qaeda) and had a secret weapons of mass destruction programme, which threatened the West – claims, which turned out to be unfounded. At the 39th Munich Security Conference in 2003 Joschka Fischer famously clashed with the US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld over the US case for war in Iraq with the words: 'Excuse me, I'm not convinced' (Weiland 2003). Thus, one could argue that part of the reasoning behind the decision not to go to war with the US in Iraq was based on strategic thinking and disbelief in the US case for war on Iraq: The US government's case against Saddam Hussein's possession of weapons of mass destruction was simply not convincing; the claim that Saddam Hussein supported al-Qaeda was equally unfounded; plans for the aftermath of the invasion were completely absent; there was a widespread fear in the German government of instability in Iraq and in the whole region if Saddam Hussein was overthrown – a fear which by all means proved right in the years after the invasion. However, the German historical lesson also played a role, not only for the German red-green government, but also for the opposition CDU. Thus, in an intervention in the *Washington Post* the chairman of the CDU, Angela Merkel, argued that the Schröder government did not speak for all Germans, and that a break with the US would have dire consequences and cause Europe to 'return to an ugly old-new reality, to the completely disillusioned world of the old Europe with its narrow-mindedness and disloyalty'. Then Merkel invoked the historical lesson that Germany had learned from the Second World War: 'The most important lesson of German politics – never again should Germany go it alone – is swept aside with seeming ease by a German federal government that has done precisely this, for the sake of electoral tactics' (Merkel 2003).³² Merkel never said clearly whether she thought that Germany should follow the US and go to war in Iraq or not – just as she never took a

(32) The article in the *Washington Post* was later used by the German left-wing parties to criticise Merkel, arguing as Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul did in 2013 that if Merkel had been in government in 2003, Germany would have joined the war (Brössler, 2013).

clear stand against it,³³ which probably helped the SPD win the elections. With upcoming elections and poor showings in the polls, the SPD had mobilised the anti-war sentiment of the German electorate. Franz Müntefering, general secretary of the SPD, invoked the *Sonderweg* discourse when he talked of a special path for Germany on the question of Iraq: 'Independently of what the UN decides, there must be a German way, that we must decide for ourselves what is to be done. That decision for us means no involvement in any ... conflict or war in Iraq' (Hooper 2003). Gerhard Schröder had employed the discourse of the conservative side of the normal state debate when he argued that Germany was now a 'self-confident' country: 'We're not available for adventures, and the time of cheque book diplomacy is over once and for all'³⁴ (Hooper 2003). On March 5, 2003 Germany, at that point a non-permanent member of the Security Council, issued a joint statement together with permanent UN Security Council members France and Russia, which said that they would not allow a UN Security Council resolution authorising the use of force in Iraq to be passed (The Guardian 2003). And even if the German chancellor was motivated by tactical considerations – the SPD had long been behind in the polls – and not deeply held convictions, his success in mobilising voters on this issue gave evidence that Schröder's anti-war stance had to do with ingrained public beliefs and convictions (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2003, p. 101).

Germany's embedded reluctance to go to war once again came to the forefront, when Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (FDP) in 2011 chose to abstain from the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorising intervention in Libya. Both feared that German involvement in another foreign intervention with an unclear outcome would sit badly with the electorate on the eve of regional elections. By abstaining Germany broke with its own position as a proponent of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, opposed its EU partners and NATO allies and instead joined ranks with Russia, China and Brazil, all for the sake of election tactics resting on the proponents of 'Never again war'. It was deemed a 'low point', 'a disaster' and a return to the old 'Bonn Republic's mentality of caution and restraint', which would lead Germany towards 'isolation' and 'going-it-alone' (*Alleingang*) (Müller 2011) (Hyde-Price 2015) – an argument which invoked the *Sonderweg* discourse (turned up-side-down), so that it was not German military activism, but the lack hereof that would lead Germany towards the abyss, referring to the conservative side of the normal state debate. Joschka Fischer lambasted it as a 'scandalous error' caused by 'provincialism', thereby drawing on the provincialism-urbanity dichotomy of the normal state debate: 'The country seems to solidify its inside-looking provincialism, and that at a time where its potential, and well, yes its leadership, is more needed than ever' (Fischer 2011). While its closest partners and allies embrace and nurse their commitment to the doctrine of responsibility to protect, Germany still likes to think of itself in terms of that bigger version of Switzerland. But this simply does not work for Europe as a whole, Ulrike Guérot of the European Council on Foreign Relations wrote (Borger 2012). And as Ullrich Fichtner

(33) The foreign policy spokesman for the CDU/CSU in the German Parliament, Friedbert Pflüger, at the 39th Munich Security Conference underlined that if they had won the previous elections, Germany would have joined the eight, primarily Eastern European countries (by Rumsfeld famously coined 'New Europe') and expressed its support for the US (Weiland, 2003).

(34) A position, which Hans Kundnani sees as a first step towards a loosening of the German *Westbindung* (integration with the West) (Kundnani, 2015).

remarked in *Der Spiegel*, 'Angela Merkel and Westerwelle have taken us back to the tired 1990's and our "history" must serve, once again, as justification for German inaction' (Fichtner 2013). Or as Ralf Neukirch and Gordon Repinski put it: The central question for Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle was: 'How can we keep out of armed conflicts?' (Repinski 2014). The end result was that the built-up trust in Germany as a reliable EU and NATO partner vanished quickly (Major & Mölling 2016, p. 32).³⁵

THE RENEWED PUSH FOR 'NORMALITY': GESTALTUNGSMACHT DEUTSCHLAND

On October 3, 2013, German Unity Day, President Joachim Gauck attempted to start a new public debate on a more active German foreign and security policy.³⁶ A few months earlier, in September 2013, Angela Merkel had re-entered the chancellor's office heading a grand coalition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) with Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) as foreign minister and Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) as defence minister, both of whom had publicly promised that they would break with the cautious policy course of the former foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle. In his Unity Day speech Joachim Gauck quoted Germany's partners, labelling Germany 'a sleepwalking giant' and a 'spectator of global affairs'. 'This begs the question,' he added, 'is our engagement on a par with the weight that our country carries? Germany is populous, lies at the heart of the continent and is the world's fourth largest economy' (Gauck 2013). Here Gauck echoed the normal state debate of the 1990s, touching on the enhanced size of the country after reunification – through a 'weight' metaphor and measurement of Germany's economic strength – and, using the *Mitte* metaphor, placed Germany at the 'heart of the continent'. In early 2014, in an effort closely coordinated by President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen, Gauck once again tried to push the German foreign policy establishment and the public a step further towards a more active German role internationally. Thus, Gauck used the 50th Munich Security Conference to ask his fellow countrymen once again whether Germany, in the light of its enhanced weight, was doing enough internationally:

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? ... In my opinion, Germany should make a more substantial contribution, and it should make it earlier and more decisively if it is to be a good partner. (Gauck 2014).

(35) One could argue that the size of the scandal illustrates that the 'Never again war' camp was severely challenged by the side that wanted a more active German foreign policy. However, the decision not to go to war seems to have been supported by the German electorate.

(36) Please note that the debate on *Gestaltungsmacht Deutschland* is somewhat different from the other debates, especially the *Historikerstreit* and the normal state debate, in the sense that it is a more intra-elite debate, consisting mainly of interventions by politicians and civil servants.

Here Gauck repeated the position he had presented on October 3, 2014, once again arguing along the lines of the conservative side of the *Historikerstreit* and the normal state debate that Germany was no 'island', and that it made no sense to 'hope to be spared from the conflicts of the world' (Gauck 2014) (Gauck 2013), echoing the notion of the Bonn era as 'an escape into the fairy tale forest' used by Karl Heinz Bohrer, among others, in the normal state debate. However, even as Gauck argued for a more active German foreign and security policy, he underlined that 'Germany will never support any purely military solution', but will use military means only as a 'last resort' and only together with its allies and in combination with political and diplomatic means. Thus, in reality he still favoured a restrained approach to the use of military solutions. However, Germany 'should not say "no" on principle. Nor should it say "yes unthinkingly"', he argued (Gauck 2014). Essentially, Gauck here positions German foreign policy between the Bonn Republic's 'Never again war' tradition and the pre-Bonn tradition of *Machtstaat* (power state), none of which are acceptable policy courses. Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen also drew on key arguments from the normal state debate in her speech at the conference, arguing that 'indifference is not an option for Germany' due to its 'major economy' and 'significant size' (Leyen 2014). Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in his speech at the Munich Security Conference repeated some of the propositions made by Gauck: 'Germany must be ready for earlier, more decisive and more substantive engagement in the foreign and security sphere' (Steinmeier 2014). Furthermore, he repeated the warning that 'the use of force is an instrument of last resort', and that force should only be used with 'restraint'. However, Steinmeier warned that 'a culture of restraint for Germany' should not 'become a culture of standing aloof'. The reason for this, Steinmeier argued, using central arguments from the normal state debate, was that 'Germany is too big merely to comment on world affairs from the sidelines' (Steinmeier 2014). In an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in the summer of 2016 Steinmeier tried to sum up the German position in the notion of Germany as a 'reflective power': Because of the country's 'historical experience' – that is, the Second World War and the Holocaust – the German public 'share a deeply held, historically rooted conviction that their country should use its political energy and resources to strengthen the rule of law in international affairs', he argued. So whenever Germany's partners walk an extra mile in order for diplomacy and negotiations to work, Germans expect their government to 'walk one mile further, sometimes to our partners' chagrin' (Steinmeier 2016). In essence, the notion of Germany as a 'reflective power' echoes the understanding that not only has Germany learned from its past, it also has a 'special responsibility' to avoid policies that lead to violence and war or at least to walk an extra-extra mile in order to avoid violence because of this 'historical lesson'. In reality, Steinmeier here used Joschka Fischer's conceptual pair of 'Never again war' and 'Never again Auschwitz'. Furthermore, the concept of 'reflective power' is closely related to the two intertwined concepts of 'think twice' and '*Führung aus der Mitte*' (leadership from the centre) presented by Ursula von der Leyen at the 51st Munich Security Conference in 2015. Here she argued that due to 'the painful history of Germany in the 20th century [which] has become part of the DNA of our people', Germany has a 'moral obligation' to do the right thing ('Never again Auschwitz') (Leyen 2015a). But because the word 'leadership' (*Führung*) in German is so closely related to Hitler and the Holocaust, arguments that Germany is ready to lead require an explanation, she said.

Thus, arguments that Germany is ready to lead from the centre (*Führung aus der Mitte*)³⁷ mean ‘to contribute one’s best resources and capabilities to alliances and partnerships’ and ‘to enable others with less resources to make their vital contributions as equal partners. With this logic in mind we combine our respective capabilities’. Also, ‘sometimes [it] means to fight together’ (Leyen 2015a) (Leyen 2015b).

The central argument of Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen is that Germany should be ready to engage earlier, more decisively and more substantially in international affairs. The culture of military restraint is still part and parcel of German strategic culture, but not by default. Furthermore, it is not just material interests that impel Germany towards a new, more active role internationally. Underneath the whole debate lies an idea of a German historical *Verantwortung* or *Pflicht* – a historical responsibility or moral duty to do the right thing in accordance with its enhanced weight and central position, because Germany has learned from its painful history.³⁸

However, despite the intentions of Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen of pushing Germany towards a more active role internationally, the immediate results showed that it was a ‘course-correction’ rather than a ‘new direction’ (Hyde-Price 2015, p. 604). After the push from Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen Germany thus reversed its position on the Syrian chemical agents following a formal request by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), offered a medical evacuation aircraft for the mission in the Central African Republic and increased the number of German soldiers in the French-led EU operation in Mali from 180 to 250. But that was it. Instead of opening a future road for strategic engagement with its partners and the outside world, Germany’s leaders chose to return to the course followed at the time of the Kosovo conflict in 1999.

Furthermore, the German foreign policy elite still had great difficulties, not least with the semantics of its imminent role as a ‘great power’ or ‘medium power’ (*Grossmacht* or *Mittelmacht*). Not even the term ‘rising power’, which would be part of the standard non-German vocabulary describing a state with the cut and shape of Germany, was *côme il faut*. Instead German foreign policy bureaucrats went out of their way to avoid using these historically charged words and came up with the term *Gestaltungsmacht*, (semi-)officially translated as ‘shaping power’ or ‘new player’. It has a clear advantage, seen from a German point of view: It not only avoids the term ‘great power’ (*Grossmacht*), but also the term ‘civilian power’ (*Zivilmacht*), circumventing the split between the two wings in the normal state debate and positioning itself somewhere in-between these two concepts. In reality, the term *Gestaltungsmacht* or shaping power is a pleonasm, as Gunther Hellmann observes, ‘since “power” is normally defined in terms of a “capacity to shape” (or “gestalten”) something’ (Hellmann 2016a, p. 12). However, the term ‘shaping power’ was still too strong a word for the foreign and security policy elite, which has done its utmost to avoid using it in descriptions of Germany. In neither of the two major

(37) The concept is a development of the Bonn Republic concepts of *Einbindung* (integration) and *Westbindung* (integrated in the West).

(38) Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen were not alone. Their position was supported by a number of German analysts. Thus, Herfried Münkler from the Humboldt-Universität argued that ‘if the Germans fail, there are no alternate or reserve candidate standing ready, which can jump in and take over this role. If Germany fails its task as Europe’s central power, Europe fails’ (Münkler 2015). Also see Schönberger (2012) and Bittner & Nass (2014).

government white papers, ‘Shaping globalization – Expanding partnerships – Sharing responsibility’ (German Government 2012) and ‘Weißbuch 2016’ (German government 2016) – which were seen as contemplating the new enhanced role of Germany – can the term be found designating Germany. The 2012 white paper is marked by a belief in the coming multi-polarity in the international system with the rise of BRICS, that is, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, due to US decline and a series of crises in the EU. It is within this group of up-and-coming or rising powers – though without designating them as such – that Germany finds its equals:

The world is becoming increasingly multipolar. States that were long thought of as developing or newly industrialized countries are now an influential force in shaping international policy in an interdependent world. They are economic motors and key regional players, active beyond their own regional boundaries. They also play an increasingly important role in international decision-making processes. They are confidently taking their place on the world stage, in international relations, and are assuming ever more responsibility for global issues. (German Government, 2012)

From the perspective of the German Government, these countries ‘are more than just emerging economies. They are new players with a voice in the conduct of world affairs’ (German Government 2012). The word ‘power’ is not popular among the bureaucratic elite, which agreed on the content of the white paper:³⁹ It is only used seven times in the entire document (in the German version *Macht* is only used three times), and apart from one occurrence where the English version of the white paper calls for a fairer distribution of world power in the Security Council (and implicitly for a seat for Germany) and one where the white paper assures the reader that arbitrary use of power will never happen again in Germany (i.e. Hitler will not come back), ‘power’ is only used in combination with positive connotations such as ‘bio fuel power’ (p. 39), ‘solar power’ (p. 40), ‘peaceful use of nuclear power’ (p. 43), ‘empower women’ (p. 63), ‘negotiating power’ (p. 64). The word ‘player’, on the other hand, is very popular. It is used 101 times and often in places where non-German writers would use the word ‘power’. The word ‘shaping’ is also used a lot, namely 47 times (15 times in the text, the rest in the watermark at the bottom of the white paper) (in the German version *gestalten* is used 43 times: 14 times in the text, the rest in the watermark), and most often along the lines of the concept of *Gestaltungsmacht* or ‘shaping power’ in sentences such as ‘[s]haping the multipolar world together’ (p. 5), ‘shaping globalization’ (p. 5) or ‘shaping international and/or global governance’ (p. 5).

In the 2016 defence white paper, *Weißbuch 2016* (German government 2016, p. 22), Germany is described as ‘die weltweit viertgrößte Wirtschaftsmacht’ or ‘the world’s fourth largest economy’ (p. 22) and a ‘key player in Europe’ (p. 22). It is seen as a country that is ‘highly interconnected with the rest of the world’, and which – ‘due to its economic, political and military significance, but also as a result of its vulnerabilities – has a responsibility to actively participate in shaping the global order’.

(39) In contrast to for example defence policy guidelines, which are written solely by the German ministry of defence, the white papers are the work of several ministries and thus reflect a broader view on German foreign and security policy (Junk & Daase, 2013, p. 141, note 2). In *Weiß Buch 2016* this group was enhanced by including independent external experts.

Furthermore, the white paper states that ‘Germany is prepared to provide a substantial, decisive and early stimulus to the international debate, to accept responsibility, and to assume leadership’ (p. 23), echoing the Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen debate. The international system is said to be in a process of changing towards ‘multi-polarity’ (p. 30), characterised by a process of increasing ‘diffusion of power’ (p. 30). However, if we take a closer look it becomes clear that the bureaucrats in the defence ministry also here have gone out of their way to use words that are mostly non-offensive and soft spoken, especially in descriptions of Germany’s supposedly increased role in the world.⁴⁰ Thus, the word ‘power’ (or *Macht*) is very seldom used in the white paper and never to describe Germany. Even the central term *Gestaltungsmacht* or ‘shaping power’, which is supposed to be the new value-free buzzword, is nowhere to be found, let alone in the description of Germany as such – even if it is clear that the German bureaucrats from the foreign and security circles believe Germany to be precisely such a power (Hellmann 2016b). Instead, the term *Gestaltung* (from the verb *gestalten* or ‘to shape’) is used in a number of ways: *Gestaltungsanspruch* or ‘aspiration’ (pp. 68, 88, 138), *Gestaltungswillen* or ‘ambition’ (p. 117), *Gestaltungsfelder* or ‘areas of engagement’ (pp. 56, 62) and *Gestaltungsbereiche* (essentially ‘areas of engagement’, but no translation is offered in the English version) (p. 107). The word ‘power’ is rarely used and only in descriptions of Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and subsequent war in Ukraine in 2014. Thus, it is stated that Russia’s actions have led to a ‘renaissance of traditional power politics, which involves the use of military means to pursue national interests and entails considerable armaments efforts’ (p. 38), and that ‘struggles for regional hegemony’ (p. 38) endanger the stability of the international system. In the conclusion it is furthermore argued that ‘effective collective defence is crucial to our very existence on account of the renaissance of traditional power politics’ (p. 138). It is clear that power and power politics are seen as something of the past, something which should be avoided and something which Germany in particular should stay clear of. Angela Merkel’s remark after speaking on the phone with Vladimir Putin during the Ukraine crisis in 2014 that he was living ‘[i]n another world’ (Baker 2014) rings true to the world view of the German foreign and security policy establishment.

Shortly after the first attempt by Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen at the 50th Security Conference in Munich in 2014 to make Germany’s foreign policy elite accept a more leading German role, the war in Ukraine broke out. The crisis in Ukraine had been growing since the Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovich, in November 2013 had decided to end negotiations with the EU over an Association Agreement and instead cut a deal with Russia. This had sparked widespread demonstrations which erupted into violence and an occupation of Maidan Square and large parts of the inner city of Kiev, escalating into a full-scale crisis. The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland (which had the EU chairmanship at this point) and Putin’s special envoy, Vladimir Lurkin, helped work out a political compromise between the government and the opposition leaders, which was signed on February 21, 2014. Yanukovich’s government nevertheless unravelled after signing the agreement – possibly because the compromise agreement contained a passage about an ‘investigation into recent acts of violence’

(40) Please note that some of the civil servants in Germany’s ministries are politically appointed, e.g. the so-called *Staatssekretäre*.

(Malik, Ganin & McCarthy 2014), which put the security forces at risk of prosecution. This led to the collapse of the security forces which began to defect, and Yanukovich went into hiding in the Crimea and ended up fleeing to Russia. The unrest in Kiev was followed by demonstrations in the Crimea, which in turn led to an armed uprising in the Crimea instigated and led by Russia. On March 18, 2014 Russia chose to annex the Crimea after a hastily arranged referendum, which was not recognised internationally, but condemned by both the EU and the US. Shortly afterwards unrest evolved in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, also supported and most probably led by Russian special forces. At the same time Russia amassed 40,000 troops at the border as part of a snap exercise of around 150,000 troops in Western Russia in order to put pressure on the interim government of Ukraine, anxious of a repetition of the Crimea scenario in the Donbas.

The situation was dire. Germany's position at the centre of Europe would put it at the heart of a refugee crisis if the conflict in Ukraine developed into full-blown war. Since the end of the Cold War Germany had developed close business ties to Russia; in fact, no other European country had benefitted more from the expanding friendly relations with Russia than Germany – and at the beginning of the crisis German businesses had more than 20 billion Euros invested in Russia and received more than 38 % of its oil and 36 % of its natural gas from Russia. On the other hand, Germany was also closely connected to Ukraine and more so to EU member Poland, which strongly supported Ukraine's course and took a very sceptical stand towards Russia's actions.

The reaction of the German government was to try to see the conflict from both sides. Angela Merkel noted that Russia's annexation was clearly a breach of international law and somewhat undiplomatically leaked the content of the above-mentioned phone conversation she had had with Vladimir Putin (Baker 2014). Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, SPD, argued that Russia had let 'the old spirit of nationalist power politics' out of the bottle and was now responsible for getting it back in again (Die Welt 2014). On the other hand, Frank-Walter Steinmeier underlined that 'one must never stop finding ways out of the escalation', and 'we have to talk more, not less'. Here, he reflected the old-standing German social democratic conviction that the Soviet Union only accepted Germany's reunification because the West German chancellor, Willy Brandt, had enacted the so-called *Ostpolitik* in the 1970s and, under Egon Bahr's concept of *Wandel durch Annäherung* (change through rapprochement), changed the relationship between the East and West through close collaboration with the GDR (Friis 2016). Thus, Steinmeier, with direct reference to Egon Bahr, coined the term *Wandel durch Verflechtung* (change through economic interlocking) (Chivvis & Rid 2009, pp. 120, note 2) (Stehenmüller 2009). German diplomacy thus did its best to try to de-escalate the crisis in order to get negotiations started. The public debate quickly developed into a heated discussion between hardliners, who wanted a clear break with Putin's Russia, and the so-called *Putin-Versteheren* (those who understood Putin), who wanted to try to understand (and condone) Putin's and Russia's actions, among them the former chancellors Gerhard Schröder and Helmut Schmidt. Thus, in an interview Helmut Schmidt argued that the situation was dangerous partly because the Western public was overreacting and because this overreaction had led to an overreaction among the Russian public. Schmidt further argued that Putin's policy was 'perfectly understandable' and, referring to the annexation of the Crimea, that not all political problems can be 'seen as legal problems'. He also answered 'yes' when a journalist from the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* asked him whether

Germany's 'history – first and foremost the Second World War – imposes a restrained approach on [German] foreign policy ... especially towards Russia' (Nass 2014). *Die Zeit* later published a public appeal for peace signed by 64 prominent persons, among them former chancellors Gerhard Schröder (SPD) and Roman Herzog (CDU), former minister of the interior Otto Schily (SPD), former Berlin mayor Eberhard Diepgen (CDU) as well as filmmaker Wim Wenders, writer Ingo Schulze and actor Klaus Maria Brandauer. The appeal assigns 'special responsibility' to Germany for keeping the peace in Europe, even a 'duty of peace' (Friedenspflicht) for the government. Thus, it is argued, there would have been no German reunification if it had not been for the 'reconciliation readiness' of the Russian people, the 'farsightedness of Mikhael Gorbachev' and the support of 'our western allies.' Furthermore, the appeal argued that it would not have been a *Sonderweg* if the German government called for 'calm' and 'dialog with Russia' (Herzog, Vollmer & Wenders 2014). In the conservative daily *Die Welt* Jacques Schuster argued that despite the crisis in the Balkans, despite the war in Afghanistan, despite the hunt for pirates in the Gulf of Aden and although more than 20 years had passed since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the German public still would not understand that Germany had to stand up to Russian aggression. Instead, he argued, Germans 'still deep down believe that wolf and lamb must graze together and that the lion eats grass or at least should go to a self-help group if it ever again had a desire for meat' (Schuster 2014). Henryk M. Broder argued, also in the conservative *Die Welt*, that the 'Germans live in a kingdom of illusions. They love consensus and see no threats at all. If at all, the only conflicts that exist for them are those which can be talked out (auspalavert)' (Broder 2014). Here, it is noteworthy that the argument structure is rather similar to the one used frequently in the normal state debate by e.g. Karl Heinz Bohrer on Bonn as a fairy tale forest.

The debate developed markedly in Ukraine's favour when on July 17, 2014 a Malaysian civilian airliner overflying the rebel-held parts of the battle zone was shot down by a Russian manufactured BUK M2 anti-aircraft missile killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew members, most of them Dutch citizens (Dutch Safety Board 2015, p. 9). As the crisis developed, Merkel tried to stay at the centre of things, saying very little in public apart from 'a few anodyne comments about "preserving the territorial integrity" of Ukraine' and kept having regular phone conversations with Putin. Steinmeier also continued the dialogue with Russia and 'played a critical role in diplomatic crisis management with his colleagues in the Weimar Triangle' (Hyde-Price 2015). Merkel put herself at the forefront of efforts to tighten EU's sanctions on Russia in coordination with the US and has remained a stark proponent of keeping the sanctions regime in place despite internal and external opposition.⁴¹ Germany also signed on to a G7 *communiqué* condemning Russia's incursion in Ukraine, but Steinmeier successfully opposed the idea of ejecting Russia from the G8 and instead brokered a compromise where the G7 announced that they would not attend the planned G8 summit in Socchi (Hyde-Price 2015, p. 609). Germany also helped favour a position not to give lethal weapons to Ukraine, which parts of the US senate favoured. On Germany's initiative the so-called Contact Group met in Minsk in September 2014 and brokered out

(41) In this Merkel was up against strong lobbying from German industry giants heavily involved in Russia. Thus, in a show for support for Vladimir Putin, Joe Kaeser, the CEO of Siemens, chose to visit Putin at his residence outside Moscow arguing that he would not let 'short-term turbulence' – his characterisation of the annexation of the Crimea – ruin the tradition of 160 years of business in Russia by Siemens (Kundnani, 2015).

a ceasefire agreement (Minsk I) under the auspices of the OSCE, which failed to halt the hostilities. A ceasefire was reached in the Minsk II agreement, which is still more or less holding.

All in all, one could argue that Germany in the case of the crisis and war in Ukraine has kept a high profile and 'led from the centre', as proposed by Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen in the coordinated foreign policy push with Gauck and Steinmeier. As Gunther Hellmann put it, it was 'especially remarkable how self-confident the federal government overtook the leading role and how self-evident this was accepted by the other participants' (Hellmann 2016b, p. 8). Still, as John Vinocur has put it, Germany's strategic community's thinking on how best to respond to Russia's actions in Ukraine was clearly dominated by calls for 'dialogue, trust and security' (Vinocur 2015). Germany's former ambassador to NATO, Martin Erdmann, complained after departing from office that the NATO alliance was 'very one-sided' in its approach to Russia pushing through with enhanced military posturing vis-à-vis Russia.⁴² Here it should be recalled that on top of or as an extended part of the Holocaust Nation discourse is a deep-rooted feeling of historical guilt vis-à-vis Russia, which makes it 'imperative for us to be markedly restrained' in all policies involving Russia, as the Green Party's leading Russia expert, Marie Luise Beck, put it in an interview in 2008 (Chivvis & Rid 2009, p. 115).⁴³ Thus, despite the renewed push, German foreign policy activism has so far only been forwarded by non-military means. The foreign policy of Germany in the Ukraine case has furthermore been characterised by a certain amount of *sowohl-als-auch* (as well as) policy. The hard, but measured diplomatic efforts of Merkel have been deliberately upset by the more soft-spoken measures of Steinmeier, reflecting not only the traditions of the two coalition parties, but also to a degree Germany's split personality in the endless debates on foreign and security policy. As Alister Miskimmon has pointed out, the German willingness to become more involved has been 'matched by moments of retrenchment of opposition to an expanding role', as was the case with the war in Iraq in 2003 and the war in Libya in 2011.

Summing up, one could argue that Germany over the course of the Gauck-von der Leyen-Steinmeier debate and the following crisis in Ukraine took some initial and difficult steps towards playing a more active and leading role in Europa, also on high politics issues, and was accepted by the other European countries in doing so. However, the leading role, which Germany took upon itself, is one where Germany leads from the centre, securely bound by partners (allies) and institutions. Furthermore, the push towards a more active role was forwarded by arguments framed by the twin concepts of 'Never again war' and 'Never again Auschwitz' as well as by calls for a special German 'duty of peace'. And perhaps equally remarkable, the voices, which argued that this is far from enough – and that Germany should move even further and be more active – adopted the argument structure of the normal state debate.

(42) During the OSCE talks in Vienna diplomats from the US, Canada and Northern European countries were somewhat astonished by the German counterpart asking them to stop their 'blame game' in support of Ukraine (Vinocur, 2015).

(43) During the Second World War more than 10.6 million Soviet soldiers and between 11.4 and 15 million civilians died (Chivvis & Rid 2009, p. 115).

CONCLUSION

The hope for or fear of a more 'normal' German state behaviour within foreign and security policy – understood as a form of behaviour that is more focussed and based on power and power politics, like the one many other great powers have been prone to historically – is premature and generally misguided when it comes to post-war, post-unification and 'post-Brexit' Germany. Despite being the largest, richest and most populous country in Europe, despite being situated at the centre of Europe and thus being affected by most developments in Europe, Germany is still somewhat reluctant to take on a leading role in Europe – at least when it comes to security issues. The reason is that German strategic culture is still highly influenced by the collective remembrance of the Holocaust and the lessons Germany have drawn from this. Thus, the Holocaust Nation discourse is still the central 'unwritten constitution' of the FRG, even if it has been 'amended' somewhat over the years. Whereas the collective lessons drawn from the abyss of the Holocaust in the Bonn Republic were *Nie wieder Krieg* ('Never again war') and led to a culture of marked restraint in foreign policy and total abstinence with regard to security issues, the collective lesson of the Berlin Republic is *Nie wieder Auschwitz* ('Never again Auschwitz')⁴⁴, which is also a culture of restraint with regard to security issues, but not complete abstinence. In other policy areas, such as economic or political, Germany is fully willing to take on a leading role. Not from the front, though, but from the middle – that is, with its hands tied up by Western institutions, partners and alliances. There is an aversion to going-it-alone and a predilection for pursuing multilateral solutions. Furthermore, there is a shared understanding in German public life and within the foreign and security policy elite that the German state is morally obligated to 'make amends' for past wrongs and to counter developments that could lead 'towards Auschwitz.' Thus, the debate does not focus on *if*, but on *how much* Germany should take the past into account in its foreign and security policy. The reason for these changes can be found in the ongoing German public debates on what it means to be German and how the German state should act. The two main debates in this regard have been the *Historikerstreit* from 1986 to 1987 and the normal state debate from 1990 to 1995.

The central theme of the *Historikerstreit* was to what extent the Holocaust was a unique German phenomenon or whether it could be compared to other genocides. If Nazism and the Holocaust were unique German phenomena, it would be impossible to 'reprocess', 'work through' and 'normalise' history – which was the central wish of the conservative side of the debate – and the horrors of the Holocaust would therefore remain a burden for the German nation and German foreign policy for all times, which the conservative historians deplored. And even though the main result of the *Historikerstreit* was to refute the conservative historians' attempt at 'normalising' history, 'normalising' is actually what happened in the period up to and during the normal state debate in the mid-1990s. Here the conceptual pair *Normal-Sonderweg* was reversed, whereby the restrained foreign policy line of the Bonn Republic was considered abnormal, as nothing but 'cheque book diplomacy', and mocked by its critics as an epoch of 'provincialism' where German politicians had been 'hiding in the fairy tale forest'. With reunification, Germany was not only considered a normal state at the heart of Europe; in the eyes of the conservative historians Germany was also destined to lead due to its unescapable role

(44) Even if 'Never again war' is not that far away.

as *Zentralmacht Europas* – Europe’s central power – which followed from its increased power, the size of its territory and economy and its position at the centre of Europe.

In the debate on German participation in the war in Kosovo in 1999, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer united the two opposing positions in the *Historikerstreit* and the normal state debate when he argued that he stood on two principles: ‘Never again war, never again Auschwitz’. And although he duly recognised the position of the Habermas wing of the *Historikerstreit*, claiming that ‘Auschwitz is incompatible’, he clearly followed the conservative side of the debate and compared the atrocities occurring in the Balkans with the Holocaust. The lesson, for him, was that Germany, because of its history, had a moral responsibility to prevent another genocide. Thus, ‘Never again Auschwitz’ won over ‘Never again war’. The culture of restraint had lost to an activist strategic culture, where measured military activism was accepted in certain cases – due to Germany’s supposed moral duty.

After the 9/11 attacks Germany pledged ‘unlimited solidarity’ with the US. In reality, however, its solidarity was far from unlimited. In fact, in order to avoid casualties and situations where the government’s cautious military activism might challenge the solidarity of the German public, the German armed forces in Afghanistan were so ‘ring fenced with caveats’ that a British officer called the Bundeswehr an ‘aggressive camping organization’. German war scepticism only grew when the Bush administration in its war on terror turned towards the so-called ‘axis of evil’ consisting of Iraq, Iran and North Korea. And Germany ended up siding with France and Russia in opposing the war in Iraq in 2003. In doing so, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder clearly used the position of the conservative side of the normal state debate in arguing that Germany was now a normal, ‘self-confident’ country not available for adventures. However, he did so in order to reinstate the culture of military restraint. Thus, Germany was back to ‘Never again war’, which won that debate.

Germany’s reluctance to go to war also came to the forefront in 2011, when Germany chose to go against its NATO and EU partners – and against its own proclaimed adherence to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) policy – and abstain from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorising intervention in Libya and thus joining ranks with Russia and China. The Merkel-Westervelle decision to abstain from voting was deemed a return to ‘provincialism’ and to the ‘Bonn Republic’s mentality of caution and restraint’, which risked leading Germany towards ‘isolation’ and ‘going-it-alone’, thus invoking an upside-down *Sonderweg* discourse, where it was not German militarism (or military activism), but the lack hereof that would lead Germany down the abyss of the *Sonderweg*.

In what looked like the return of the normal state debate, Gauck, Steinmeier and von der Leyen in 2013-2014 tried to instigate renewed foreign and security policy activism. Thus, Gauck argued that ‘Germany must be ready for earlier, more decisive and more sustained engagement in the foreign and security sphere’. Consequently, the bureaucratic elite consisting of the foreign and defence ministries, interest groups and foreign policy experts was called in to help formulate the content of the three new central concepts: *Gestaltungsmacht* (‘shaping power’), *Führung aus der Mitte* (‘leadership from the middle’) and Germany as a *reflective power*. The essence of these three concepts is to try to bridge the divide between the conservatives and the left-wing (or social democratic) side of the *Historikerstreit* and the normal state debate, which had been dominating ever since. Thus, it is an attempt to give priority

to 'Never again Auschwitz' over 'Never again war' and to defend a position where Germany can be an active great power without being labelled so. Thus, an active great power, which takes on a leading role, not from the front, but from the middle – that is, embedded in institutions and surrounded by partners – and continues to be highly reluctant to use military power. Furthermore, it is an attempt to leave behind the 'Germany as a civilian power' of the Bonn Period without upsetting the large part of the German public that still clings to 'Never again war'.

It is an attempt towards a more active foreign and security policy, which does not come easy for the Germans. Thus, the bureaucratic elite did its best to avoid the terms *Grossmacht* ('great power') and *Mittelmacht* ('middle power'), which remain negatively charged concepts, and came up with *Gestaltungsmacht* ('shaping power'), which was only used indirectly about Germany, even if it was clear that the elite considered Germany just that. All in all, it seems fair to say that power politics is still far from being *comme il faut* for the German foreign and security policy elite. This attempt to bridge the divide resulted in a classical *sowohl-als-auch* (both ... and) position. And this seems to be exactly where the German government landed during the Ukraine crisis. Here German diplomacy, under the leadership of Steinmeier, did its best to de-escalate the crisis by 'talking-more, not less' with the Russians. Thus illustrating the German preference for non-confrontational defence and for pursuing compromise (Steinmeier: 'We go an extra-extra mile') and displaying the post-war German sensitivity towards Russia, which lost so many people during the Second World War at the hands of Hitler's Wehrmacht. At the same time, Merkel remained at the centre of the efforts to curve in Russia (through diplomatic means only) and secure stability, calculability and accountability in international affairs. Thus, Germany in reality accepted and was accepted in the role as *Zentralmacht Europas* ('Europe's central power'), doing its best to 'lead from the centre' and to coordinate efforts with its European and American partners. Thus, one could argue that the Gauck-von der Leyen-Steinmeier debate and the crisis in Ukraine resulted in initial, but measured steps towards playing a more active role in leading Europe, also on foreign and security policy. However, both the politicians who pushed for a more active role for Germany and the critics who wanted even more argued along the lines of the well-established argument muster of the *Historikerstreit* and the normal state debate. Furthermore, Germany's renewed foreign policy activism in the Ukraine crisis was only forwarded with non-military means and only to a very limited extent.

All in all, these movements back and forth between 'Never again war' and 'Never again Auschwitz' somewhat resemble the movements of a pendulum. As one analyst noted, the German willingness to become more involved has been 'matched by moments of retrenchment of opposition to an expanding role', as was the case with the war in Iraq in 2003 and the war in Libya in 2011 – and was very close both in 1999 in Kosovo and in 2001 in Afghanistan. And this is likely to continue. However, please note both that this is not the behaviour of a 'normal' great power (if you accept the term) – both positions are very restrained compared to other great powers. Please also note that although it looks like a pendulum moving back and forth over a common centre, that centre does not stand completely still. Germany is moving towards a more proactive foreign policy course, also when it comes to security issues – but only very slowly and only when it is bound by partners and institutions. Thus, it is essentially moving within the frame of Germany's post-reunification strategic culture of 'Leading from the centre' (a development of *Einbindung* and *Westbinding*), 'Never again war' and 'Never again Auschwitz'. All in all, a course correction rather than a new direction.

Furthermore, since Germany's use of military force so far in each case, in one way or another, has been framed as an exceptional measure, which has been necessary due to Germany's historical lesson from the Second World War and the Holocaust – an argument structure which worked well with the war-sceptic German public – German politicians have built up distinct limits to Germany's ability to use force: Not all conflicts can be drawn up in black and white, good or evil, thus limiting the freedom of movement of Germany's future use of military power and its ability to lead on high politics issues. This rings especially true because of the German *Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz*, which states that the parliament must approve all use of military force outside the NATO area, thereby giving parliamentary debates – and public debates – a large say on German security policy.

The problem with the question of whether Germany now, at long last, has 'returned to normal' or not is that the definition of a 'normal' state or nation depends on a distinct (national romantic) understanding of the nation state as the normal unit of history. This point seems to have gone unnoticed by large parts of especially the more practically oriented IR scholars discussing Germany's development as a state. As argued in the above analysis of the normal state debate, the prevailing concept of normality in this debate is based on the assumption that a normal state has the ability and willingness to use military means to pursue a given foreign policy goal. This implicitly delegates the discourse of 'Germany as a civilian power' with its restrained foreign policy profile and its reluctance to using military means to achieve political goals as 'abnormal', whereby the whole *raison d'être* of the foreign and security policy of the Bonn era is characterised as 'abnormal'. Considerations such as these are largely absent, not only in the German part of the debate on Germany's role, but even more so in the international debate. One reason could be a lack of discussions on what constitutes concepts such as state and nation. Thus, when structural realists (neo-realists) argue that the German case is a structural anomaly, they may be right, but then it is a rather long-term and certainly most stable anomaly. One could argue that even if structural theory is not interested in explaining 'why state X made a certain move last Tuesday', as Kenneth Waltz famously phrased it (Waltz 1979, p. 121), we should expect it to be able to theoretically grasp political developments of a span of more than a quarter of a century. Furthermore, one might argue that even if the normal state metaphor is efficient, it is still only a metaphor. Normality, at least for states, is a matter of definition. And that definition changes over time and from country to country and, apparently, sometimes from debate to debate. The question for Germany should therefore not be if it is normal or not, but whether it leads a sensible and reasonable foreign and security policy.

Another theoretical point on which this report has tried to shed some light is the thesis that (at least Germany's) strategic culture could be seen as the (ever-changing) end product of a funnel process which blends public and elite discussions on strategic choices with questions of identity resting on shared collective understandings of history. Thus, the outcome of the relatively closed circle meetings of Germany's foreign and security policy elite is seemingly highly affected by long gone public debates by historians, philosophers, journalists and others on how Germany's history and role in the world should be understood. Our language is not our own, Wittgenstein argues. And the language, the positions and the words of these long gone debates have seeped through the doors to these closed circle meetings, living as they are in the heads of the men and women who make strategic decisions.

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