



Pawel Swieboda,
President of the Board of demosEUROPA – Centre for European Strategy Foundation

Beyond defence of the status quo!

May 18 ***Military capacities and a strong anchorage in the EU***

One other German reinvention in foreign policy is needed. The only endeavour commensurate with Germany's strength and level of ambition is that of an explicit attempt to shape the rules of the international political and economic order, in strict alignment with Berlin's EU allies. None of these ambitions can materialise if this new German foreign policy orientation is not embedded in a domestic consensus.

As in many mature democracies, the biggest challenge to German foreign policy lies inside the country's domestic discourse. Much of its post-war reinvention had to do with taming the risks which Germany could pose to itself and to others.

The process is long since complete but what lingers on are its side-effects: the self-imposed limitations on Germany's foreign engagement and the tendency for Germany to underestimate security risks in its external environment.

Germany is not unique in choosing the path of introversion. Many countries experience a similar difficulty in dealing with the growing complexities of the interconnected world. Part of the phenomenon is an instinctive reaction to the perceived failure of liberal interventionism, a post-Cold War attempt to spread democracy, if needed through the power of the gun. In Germany's case, the introversion has been written large and became a constitutional feature of modern German statehood.

It is not that the country has been a passive foreign policy actor. Germany has an unspoken vision of foreign policy. In that vision, economic interdependence serves as a great stabiliser which is bound to limit the scope for great power conflict.

The rules of interdependence

Germany is willing to go to a greater length than its Western peers in

accommodating open challenges to the existing global order as well as the more nuanced distortions created by the ongoing shifts of power.

The assumption Berlin seems to be making, whether knowingly or unknowingly, is that intruders and spoilers in the international system can be socialised into a cooperative mode of behaviour. In line with this logic, acceptance of their sporadically rogue attitude is justified by avoidance of the worst-case scenario. It is this rationale which currently guides much of German policy over the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Germany is right about attaching enormous expectations to the taming power of global interdependence. If the current period stands out in recent history, it is for the spread of opportunity and hope. The age of great convergence is a powerful equaliser in which everyone, even failed states have a credible chance of turning the corner.

At the same time, whether this enormous scale of modern day interdependence will usher in a new age of reason in international relations remains an open question. It follows that while trying to make the global system more inclusive is in itself an entirely legitimate course of action, putting all actors in the same basket and treating their actions as natural and legitimate expressions of growing aspirations, can be self-defeating.

Germany has not wasted an opportunity to expand its vast economic presence in line with the opening up of new markets. By courting partners of different political and moral persuasion, it has created the impression of being able and willing to go the extra mile to accept their unorthodox behaviour.

This has reduced Germany's influence as the perception has made inroads of a country which sees the world in static terms, considering power shifts as largely benevolent developments to which one has to adjust.

We have seen as a result a proliferation of the different German agendas and the meshing of the country's fundamental stakes with a "narcissism of minor interests" of its individual economic actors.

It is not so much the economisation of German foreign policy as the fact that various sectorial interests in Germany have emancipated themselves from the German *raison d'être* in their pursuit of unilateral objectives. As a result, there are many Germanies which partners get to see. This also comes with a cost to Berlin's power of persuasion.

Self-restraint or free-ride?

In addition, the German introversion has been applied across the board, leading to a political as well as military restraint. The country's self-imposed timidity in the military sphere is entirely understandable and respected by partners.

What is not received well is the lack of a compensatory offer in other areas, be it transformative governance or civilian stabilisation, where Germany could well have put forward its vast expertise. Not demonstrating a sense of engagement commensurate with its economic power, Germany cannot change the perception that it is partly free-riding on the open international system from which it draws enormous benefits.

Coupled with it is a sense of unpredictability about the German position, best illustrated by the vote on Libya at the UN but reiterated in other crisis situations. Germany's partners would prefer to bitterly argue with Berlin rather than attempt to decipher its next move.

Finally, Germany has not internalised the fallout of the eurozone crisis for Europe's standing in the world. A belief lingers among Berlin's European partners that the country has been intent on liberating itself from the limitations of the European process, burdening as it may be in the times of crisis. Germany's "go-it-alone" stint in the first phase of the eurozone crisis greatly reduced the willingness of the other member states to coordinate their international positions.

External dimension of the German reinvention

There are three sets of implications which result from this diagnosis for German foreign policy. First of all, much of the effort lies inside the country. Germany needs to complete its reinvention by creating a fully-fledged external dimension of modern German statehood.

It has to advance a debate about the type of the world to which it would want to belong. Naturally, this type of a project will not materialise without addressing the question of Germany's prime locus of belonging.

Germany's place at the heart of the Western community of values needs to be reflected in domestic clarity about the underlying set of values. In parallel, Germany has to create its own common denominator which would bridge the different and not always entirely compatible positions and attitudes of its institutions and economic actors. At the moment, there often seems to be no such a thing as the German foreign policy consensus. There has to be one in the future.

Germany needs to abandon its tendency to sanctify the status quo and see merits of bringing about change in the international system. This means that it should no longer downplay the risks to Europe's security which come from threats in the immediate vicinity.

Shaping the rules of the international system

There is an instinctive assumption behind much of Germany's foreign policy that change can almost by definition be for the worse. Germany would be well-advised to scrutinise a range of possible global scenarios in order to conceptualise more clearly

what type of external environment it is likely to encounter in the future.

A refooting of German foreign policy will not materialise without a project of similar weight and magnitude to that of the *Ostpolitik*. The only endeavour commensurate with Germany's strength and level of ambition is that of a *Globale Politik*, an explicit attempt to shape the rules of the international political and economic order, in strict alignment with Berlin's EU allies.

Such a policy would be about developing Germany's own vision of globalisation in which trust in its transformative power would be counterbalanced by a range of red lines, the crossing of which Germany would not be willing to accept. In practical terms, this would also need to come with a code of conduct for the foreign engagement of the country's powerful economic actors.

As part of its global policy, Germany would need to create a balance sheet of the advantages it draws from globalisation and the contribution it makes to greater international stability and the preservation of global public goods, such as open shipping lines.

Internationally, Germany should lead efforts at reinventing multilateralism. In spite of the crisis in which many multilateral institutions find themselves, not least the WTO, there is no alternative to ensuring the sustainability of the world order other than through a web of multilateral processes and institutions.

It may well be that the latter have become too heavily skewed towards inclusiveness and hence they lost traction for the largest players in the global system, including the United States and Europe. The on-going trade negotiations in the framework of TTIP, TPP or the Pacific Alliance are creating a new dynamic but will need to be linked sensibly together.

There is enormous role for Germany, as the world's leading trading nation, to lead efforts aimed at relaunching multilateralism. In addition, as a country which has successfully remade itself in the past, Germany should specialise in transformative policies and governance reform, demand for which is only bound to grow.

Rapprochement with hard power

A successful global policy requires a strong footing in the EU's volatile neighbourhood. Credibility of what Germany and Europe would want to achieve internationally is heavily affected by the fact that the EU happens to be surrounded by countries whose performance has been rather dismal in the last two decades and who have not taken much opportunity from globalisation. Ukraine's GDP per capita is less than two-thirds that of Thailand.

The one conclusion one can draw from international comparisons is that failure to reform and create the governance system more inclusive makes all the difference. This means that Germany and the EU as a whole should insist on transparency and accountability to become the backbone of the new political culture which will emerge

from the current upheaval in the neighbourhood. There are no short-cuts to the rule of law.

Germany will not succeed in its foreign policy reinvention, if it does not review its attitudes towards hard power. Historically imbedded self-restraint and a genuine lack of conviction about the usefulness of hard power cannot prevent Germany from a tangible improvement of capabilities and expressing more readiness to support allies militarily.

Developments of the past years and the scale of the European underinvestment in security and defence have already put the question of power projection out of the equation. This may make it easier for Germany to reassess its attitude to hard power with two objectives in mind – the first would be for a strengthened defence posture and optimisation of expenditure among EU partners. The second prime focus of the German rapprochement with hard power should be to offer support to the stabilisation missions undertaken by the allies. The current German government's willingness to provide reinforcements for the French-led mission in Mali should be a reflection of the more thorough paradigm shift in German thinking.

Firming up the EU anchor

Finally, German foreign policy will need to be more firmly anchored in the EU system. There is no reason to doubt Berlin's commitment to Common Foreign and Security Policy. However, Germany has often positioned itself as one among equals and converged around the relatively low common denominator of what the EU can agree together.

It would be meaningful if Germany led the drive for a stronger position of the new High Representative in the 2014-2019 institutional cycle. It should also flag its support for more initiatives to be undertaken by groups of member states.

Although cohesion is a value in itself in the EU, the price for achieving it should not be measured by greater inactivity. At the symbolic level, Germany could signal its intention to attach more weight to the EU system by inviting the new President of the European Council and/or the new High Representative to join in for key of the foreign engagements of its leaders.

None of these agenda items can materialise if Germany does not solve its biggest challenge, namely the way its foreign policy orientation is embedded in the domestic consensus. The safe-haven of historically induced introversion is a thing of the past. Germany will either adjust to it in advance or have to respond to events.