

## THE PARADOX OF GERMAN POWER OF HANS KUNDNANI

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Again, as in the years before World War I and II, Germany seems to be too big to be a European state like any other, but too small to be a hegemon of Europe. About 150 years after the foundation of the German Reich that once led to a substantial shift in Europe's balance of power, the "German question" – believed to be solved decades ago – re-emerges once again "in a new form". Germany, appearing both powerful and weak at the same time, has become a political paradox again that is challenging the European community.

In his book "The paradox of German Power" the British author Hans Kundnani analyzes the development of German foreign policy since it came into existence as a state. According to him, there has been a fundamental transformation of the political priorities since the early 2000s, causing a new disturbance of balance inside of Europe. The modern imbalance, though, is not so much introduced by Germany's military potential, as was the case in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but by its economic strength and its dominant role in the EU. The problem is thus not a geopolitical one, but what could be described, in line with Edward Luttwak, as a "geo-economical" one. By means of its economic power, on the one hand Germany forces the members of the Euro zone into austerity policy and thereby creates an "instability culture" (110). On the other hand, recent German foreign policy seems to be influenced more by economic interests than by alliances, which induces fear of the onset of a new "Sonderweg" in Western states. Kundnani characterizes this policy as a "strange mixture of economic assertiveness and military abstinence" (103).

The author develops his position by illustrating the classical "German question" that evolved with the creation of a German nation in 1871. The large state in the middle of Europe disturbed the balance of power - by its mere existence, but even more by the aggressive expansionist politics of colonization. Although Germany was considered a powerful threat by its neighbors, it perceived itself as vulnerable because of its "Mittellage", being surrounded by other European powers. It was partly because of this paradoxical situation, that European powers built a complicated system of alliances in an attempt to create a security balance, which ultimately led the continent into World War I.

This imbalance problem was not solved before the end of World War II, when Germany was divided into a western and an eastern state – both significantly smaller and less powerful than the former German nation. Due to its new geopolitical position at the very edge of Western Europe, the newly created Federal Republic of Germany strongly depended on the security guaranteed by NATO, which made it a reliable western ally

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during the Cold War. Still, because of historical experience the FRG didn't recognize itself as a "normal" state. Any kind of political solo action was out of the question. Hence, German foreign policy was strongly imbedded into multilateral structures. The rapprochement to the Soviet Union as a careful attempt to reunification – the so-called "Ostpolitik" – never challenged the FRG's self-conception as a Western state.

These strong ties did not disappear in the years after Germany's reunification in 1990. Although first steps to "normality" were made by means of small military engagements, these operations were primarily understood as taking responsibility in the Western Alliance. It was not before the opposition to the Iraq War in 2003 that a new and more self-confident understanding of the term "normality" evolved, which now included the open pursuit of Germany's own political interests. This development coincided with a stronger economic dependency on exports in the early 2000s as a consequence of the labor market reforms.

The fact that Germany no longer relied "on the US and NATO for protection" (90) enabled foreign policy to focus more on economic interests. Of course, this politically more "realist" approach was not completely new. The economical focus has been strong ever since the Federal Republic and even before, as Kundnani illustrates. However, what was new was the politically distinct role that Germany took inside the Western Alliance, reflected for example in its position towards Russia, China or Iran. It is shown even more in Germany's denial of a military engagement in Libya, which can be understood as a weakening of multilateralism. Another new development was Germany's recent insistence on its economic preferences regarding the Euro, risking even an alliance against Germany in the EU. Overall, Kundnani identifies a clear shift from an "idealist" to a "realist" position in German foreign policy.

This explicit division of "realist" and "idealist" approaches put forward in the book seems somewhat questionable. Strong western-oriented multilateralism in the early years of the Federal Republic could, for instance, be argued "realist", as it led to more sovereignty. Just as well, the completely excluded efforts made by Germany in international environmental politics in the 2000s could be argued to be "idealist" driven. The described tendency that foreign policy is based more and more on distinct (economical) interests is nevertheless convincing.

To make his point, Kundnani concisely creates a coherent picture of Germany's political continuity and change. He demonstrates profound knowledge of the inner debates as well as the exterior view and manages to add enriching background information without losing focus on the central topic. The author's argumentation is confident and assertive, but never inadequate. And while you sometimes get the feeling that Kundnani is trying hard to arrange an argument to fit – for example when he focuses on statements of former office holders who are out of active politics for years or accentuates the role of the debate whether Germans were victims as well in World War II, which actually did not play a significant role in the justification of any kind of politics – the major line of thought stays traceable at any time.

A major strength of the book is, of course, its high relevance and the topicality of its issue. Western states' fears of a more "equidistantly" oriented, Russia-friendly Germany did not prove true in the Crimean crisis. Nonetheless, considering the latent Eurozone crisis and the fact that a consistent NATO-position towards Syria is yet to be found, tensions are likely to increase. However, the book can not only be read as an analysis of Germany's current foreign and European policy but as well as a plea for more historical awareness. In view of the imminent throwbacks of European integration, such as the limitation of the Schengen Agreement and nationalism on the rise, some retrospection seems advisable not only for Germany.

## REFERÊNCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

- Kundnani, H. (2015). *The Paradox of German Power*. Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 160. ISBN-13: 978-0190245504.