

Breaking with convention?

Zeitenwende and the traditional pillars of German foreign policy

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On 27 February 2022, against the backdrop of the Russian invasion of Ukraine just a few days earlier, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz addressed the Bundestag to lay out his government's response to the crisis. On its own, the date of the speech was extraordinary—the Bundestag does not normally sit on a Sunday—but this symbolism was trumped by the content and reception of the speech. To applause and standing ovations from across the chamber, Scholz announced a radical shift in several core pillars of German foreign and security policy as he proclaimed a *Zeitenwende* for Germany—a turning-point or watershed moment. The new policy's significance was indeed remarkable, as a commentator on Germany's principal news channel underscored:

In the face of the Russian threat, and for the first time in three decades, a German government realizes that much acclaimed 'soft power' is not enough and has to be accompanied by 'hard power': deterrence policy backed up by military strength.¹

This article will review the core implications of the *Zeitenwende* speech, and how they affected the major traditional characteristics of Germany's foreign policy—*Westbindung* (integration into the West) and European integration; multilateralism; the pursuit of a rules-based international order and NATO membership; hesitant leadership; *Ostpolitik* and *Wandel durch Handel* (transformation through trade)—as well as a foreign policy that did not rely on military means (some authors have called this foreign policy tradition 'pacifist',² or have dubbed Germany a 'civilian power'³). It will argue that some traditions of German foreign policy (*Westbindung*, a commitment to multilateralism and European integration, and a reluctance to assert leadership) have remained largely intact over the years and will probably continue to do so with *Zeitenwende*. Others have been more in flux and will be quite seriously altered by *Zeitenwende* (*Ostpolitik* and *Wandel durch Handel*, and to some extent the non-military foreign policy). *Zeitenwende* will thus

¹ Kai Küstner, 'Deutschlands Außenpolitik: Strategie für mehr Sicherheit gesucht', tagesschau.de, 25 March 2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/nationale-sicherheitsstrategie-101.html> (author's translation). (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 14 July 2022.)

² See e.g. Jamie Gaskarth and Kai Oppermann, 'Clashing traditions: German foreign policy in a new era', *International Studies Perspectives* 22: 1, 2021, pp. 84–105.

³ Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns W. Maull, eds, *Germany as a civilian power? The foreign policy of the Berlin Republic*, Issues in German Politics (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

be an important milestone in Germany's foreign policy because of its implications. But its reception, too, demonstrated the speech's significance. It was enthusiastically received in the Bundestag and found substantial support from the public.⁴ It will thus be difficult for this (or any future) government to backpedal on its core ambitions, especially if Russian aggressions and atrocities continue. Moreover, rather than presenting a shift that should worry Europe or the world, *Zeitenwende* means that Germany remains firmly committed to European integration, transatlantic cooperation and multilateralism. Scholz acknowledged that Germany had to do more for its own and Europe's security. In that sense, *Zeitenwende* represents Germany's final acceptance of, and coming to terms with, the realities of the post-Cold War European order. It is a commitment to defending the status quo.

It is therefore Germany's policies within Europe, rather than in relation to other key global players, that will be the focus of this article. It will not be possible to provide extensive details on the history of German foreign relations.⁵ Nor will this piece determine whether Germany is a 'civilian power',⁶ a 'normative power',⁷ a 'reluctant hegemon',⁸ a 'geo-economic power',⁹ a 'sleep-walking giant',¹⁰ an 'indispensable nation',¹¹ a 'reflective power',¹² or any other characterization of this kind. Rather, it will assume that many of the characteristics associated with these concepts are present in German foreign policy, to varying extents depending on the specific situation. The article will explain the historical roots and dilemmas of current German foreign policy, and why history—and its long shadow—matter if we are to understand contemporary politics. Berlin's decisions have often caused frustration among Germany's partners, and this article illuminates the background to these decisions. But it will also analyse why the *Zeitenwende* speech and its aftermath are so significant: for Scholz's new policy not only instituted major shifts in, but also reconfirmed old notions of, how Germany has traditionally understood and conducted foreign affairs.

⁴ Liana Fix and Julia Ganter, 'Haben die Deutschen die Zeitenwende verstanden?', *Der Spiegel*, 24 March 2022.

⁵ On this, see Christian Hacke, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Von Konrad Adenauer bis Gerhard Schröder* (Munich: Ullstein Taschenbuch, 2003); Helga Haftendorn, *Coming of age: German foreign policy since 1945* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Gregor Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik: von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 2013); Stephan Bierling, *Vormacht wider Willen: deutsche Außenpolitik von der Wiedervereinigung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 2014); Bernhard Blumenau, 'German foreign policy and the "German problem" during and after the Cold War: changes and continuities', in Bernhard Blumenau, Jussi Hanhimäki and Barbara Zanchetta, eds, *New perspectives on the end of the Cold War: unexpected transformations?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 104–28; Dominik Geppert and Hans Jörg Hennecke, eds, *Interessen, Werte, Verantwortung: deutsche Außenpolitik zwischen Nationalstaat, Europa und dem Westen: zur Erinnerung an Hans-Peter Schwarz* (Leiden: Schöningh, 2019); Stefan Fröhlich, *Das Ende der Selbstfesselung: deutsche Außenpolitik in einer Welt ohne Führung* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019).

⁶ Harnisch and Maull, *Germany as a civilian power?*

⁷ Beverly Crawford and Kim B. Olsen, 'The puzzle of persistence and power: explaining Germany's normative foreign policy', *German Politics* 26: 4, 2017, p. 592.

⁸ William E. Paterson, 'The reluctant hegemon? Germany moves centre stage in the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49: 1, 2011, pp. 57–75.

⁹ Stephen F. Szabo, *Germany, Russia and the rise of geo-economics* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Hans Kundnani, *The paradox of German power* (London: Hurst, 2014).

¹⁰ Adrian G. V. Hyde-Price, 'The "sleep-walking giant" awakes: resetting German foreign and security policy', *European Security* 24: 4, 2015, pp. 600–16.

¹¹ Matthias Matthijs, 'The three faces of German leadership', *Survival* 58: 2, 2016, p. 136.

¹² Frank-Walter Steinmeier, 'Germany's new global role', *Foreign Affairs* 95: 4, 2016, pp. 106–13.

Analysing the implications of *Zeitenwende* is also a preliminary exercise, for current German foreign policy has many moving parts, some of which change quite fast. The extent to which the ambitions expressed by Scholz will be translated into actual politics remains to be seen. Yet the speech and the subsequent government decisions presented a clear declaration of the foreign policy goals of Scholz's government, and therefore allow some conclusions to be drawn already.

The article will first address the major points of the *Zeitenwende* speech, before looking at the key aspects of traditional German foreign policy and how they will be affected by *Zeitenwende*. The main insights, that a few traditions were radically altered by *Zeitenwende*, while many others continue to be upheld, will be summed up in the conclusions.

Zeitenwende

German foreign policy is marked by relative stability across governing coalitions. Basic principles such as a firm integration into the western alliance, European integration, the rejection of military means in foreign policy, and an active engagement with Russia have remained cornerstones of how Germany has conducted external affairs for decades. When a new German government took over from the long-serving Chancellor Angela Merkel in late 2021, it looked as if no major changes were on the horizon. In fact, Chancellor Olaf Scholz had campaigned on the basic premise that he would essentially continue Merkel's style and core policies.¹³ In the context of growing Russian aggression against Ukraine in late 2021 and early 2022 his new coalition, formed by the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP), upheld the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project despite growing international criticism. In relation specifically to the Russian presidency of Vladimir Putin, the new coalition continued an approach that underscored dialogue and expected strong economic relations with Germany and the West to restrain Putin's territorial ambitions.¹⁴ It was also assumed that the Berlin government would continue decades-long policies to keep the defence budget low and the armed forces poorly equipped.

However, when Putin recognized Ukraine's breakaway regions of Luhansk and Donetsk in late February 2022, things began to change in Germany. It started with the federal government finally suspending the Nord Stream 2 project, which was in itself significant. Then came the true watershed moment when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February. As an immediate response, Berlin allowed weapons shipments to Ukraine—a major reversal of a decades-long principle of not sending weapons to crisis regions. Three days later, Scholz addressed the Bundestag to lay out his new foreign policy strategy. In a move that resembled the declaration of the Ten-Point Plan in 1989 by Helmut Kohl, who also did not consult with most of his allies or government partners prior to his speech,¹⁵ Scholz made a suite of

¹³ Christoph von Marschall, 'Die Außenpolitik wird zum Hätetest für Scholz', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 7 Dec. 2021.

¹⁴ Daniel Brössler, 'Olaf Scholz und Außenpolitik: ein selbstbewusster Diplomat berät ihn', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 Dec. 2021.

¹⁵ Helmut Kohl, *Vom Mauerfall zur Wiedervereinigung: meine Erinnerungen* (Munich: Knaur-Taschenbuch, 2009),

high-impact policy announcements:

24 February 2022 marks a watershed in the history of our continent ... We are living through a watershed era. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before. [Putin's warmongering] requires strength of our own ... we will stand unconditionally by our collective defence obligation within NATO ... what is needed to secure peace in Europe will be done ... To make it possible, the Bundeswehr needs new, strong capabilities ... It is clear that we must invest much more in the security of our country. In order to protect our freedom and our democracy ... The goal is a powerful, cutting-edge, progressive Bundeswehr that can be relied upon to protect us ... That is what is important. And it is quite certainly something that a country of our size and our significance within Europe should be able to achieve ... We will therefore set up a special fund for the Bundeswehr. [And we] will provide a one-off sum of 100 billion euro for the fund ... We will now—year after year—invest more than two percent of our gross domestic product in our defence ... We have set this goal not only because we have made a promise to our friends and allies ... We are also doing this for us, for our own security ... The challenge consists in strengthening the sovereignty of the European Union sustainably and permanently.¹⁶

Scholz finished his speech with a commitment to the EU:

For Germany and for all of the EU's other member states, that means not simply asking what they can extract in Brussels for their own country. But asking: What is the best decision for our Union? Europe is our framework for action.

In his speech, Scholz also announced a series of sanctions on Russia and a commitment to new European armament projects, to armed drones, and to equipping the armed forces (Bundeswehr) with new jets capable of delivering US atomic warheads in the framework of NATO's nuclear participation. All these announcements ended ongoing, lengthy debates that had haunted German politics for years or decades. Supported by standing ovations from the Bundestag, Scholz seized the moment and produced a *fait accompli*.¹⁷ Using the momentum of public support for strong responses to Putin's aggression, and with lawmakers across the board appalled by the invasion, Scholz had a fertile environment in which to have the parliament sign up to policy shifts that would otherwise have taken years to formulate. Also remarkable was the fact that the sanctions that Germany

pp. 108–27. Newspapers reported that Scholz made the decision himself and consulted only a select few advisers or other politicians: see Helene Bubrowski, Peter Carstens, Friederike Haupt, Mona Jaeger, Johannes Leithäuser and Markus Wehner, 'Die Tage der Kehrtwende: der Coup des Kanzlers', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 March 2022; Daniel Brössler, Constanze von Bullion, Paul-Anton Krüger, Henrike Roßbach and Mike Szymanski, 'Wie der Kanzler alle überraschte: 100 Milliarden für die Bundeswehr', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28 Feb. 2022. While ultimately a matter of speculation, it is likely that the secrecy around the content of the speech was kept in order to prevent any leaks to the media, much as in the case of Kohl. This prevented the new policies from being discussed before they were declared, thus giving less opportunity for any opposition groups to form within the coalition parties, seeking to dismiss or water down the new policies. Lastly, producing a *fait accompli* allowed Scholz to shape the agenda and use the momentum to secure support for his new policies. Again much as in the case of Kohl, he seized a window of opportunity.

¹⁶ Olaf Scholz, 'Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and member of the German Bundestag, 27 Feb. 2022 in Berlin', Bundesregierung.de, 27 Feb. 2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>.

¹⁷ Bubrowski et al., 'Die Tage der Kehrtwende'.

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and the EU had imposed upon Russia since late February had the potential to cause major disruption and damage to German businesses. Germany's export-led economic model is very susceptible to changes in the international environment,¹⁸ and German governments have been traditionally sceptical of sanctions, especially on important global players. This is why this shift in foreign policy was so important. It very clearly subjugated trade interests to foreign and security–political considerations.

Zeitenwende and its impact on Germany's core foreign policy pillars

The section will now look at the core concepts in German foreign policy traditions and how *Zeitenwende* will affect them.

Westbindung and European integration

Prior to 1949, Germany had a somewhat complicated relationship with the 'West'. In the nineteenth century, strong cultural, trade and dynastic links existed. At the same time, though, there was a strong drive for a distinctly German identity.¹⁹ This continued in the twentieth century, and the end of the First World War saw Weimar Germany as a pariah in the international arena. Shackled by the Treaty of Versailles, it turned to another outsider, Soviet Russia. Through the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo, the two states set the foundation for close cooperation in various fields, among them military cooperation. Consequently, Germany saw itself as between the East and the West, as middle European.²⁰ The Nazis, too, considered Germany as vastly superior, but neither western nor eastern. It was only with the end of the Second World War and Germany's complete desolation and surrender that the country was finally forced to pick a side. West Germany was subsequently integrated into the western alliance and economic bloc, and Konrad Adenauer's government was content to see this happen. But during the initial years of the new Federal Republic, parts of the political elite—especially the left-leaning SPD—still wanted West Germany to be more neutral and to act as a bridge between East and West.²¹ However, over the next decades, *Westbindung* became part of Germany's *raison d'état* and, occasional disagreements notwithstanding,²² West Germany's commitment to the West was never seriously in question.²³ When

¹⁸ Rainer Hillebrand, 'Germany and the new global order: the country's power resources reassessed', *E-International Relations*, 22 Sept. 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/09/22/germany-and-the-new-global-order-the-countrys-power-resources-reassessed/>.

¹⁹ Hans Kundnani, 'Leaving the West behind: Germany looks east', *Foreign Affairs* 94: 1, 2015, p. 109.

²⁰ In fact, *Mittleuropa* plans surfaced at various times in German history; see Jörg Brechtfeld, *Mittleuropa and German politics: 1848 to the present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

²¹ David Broughton, 'Elite consensus and dissensus in West German foreign policy', in Emil Kirchner and James Sperling, eds, *The Federal Republic of Germany and NATO: 40 years after* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), pp. 54–7.

²² For example, about an offset agreement for American soldiers in West Germany, Bonn's contributions to the Vietnam War or American scepticism towards *Ostpolitik*.

²³ Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik*, ch. 3; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen. Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: Beck, 2014).

the prospect of reunification emerged in 1989–90, there were concerns among its neighbours that Germany might turn its back on the West and pursue its own central European agenda again.²⁴ However, these fears were not borne out, and Germany remained a staunch supporter of the two important western projects of cooperation: NATO and European integration. While it saw itself as a champion of *rapprochement* with post-Soviet Russia and east European states, Germany's basic orientation and self-perception was that of a western nation. Even Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's falling-out with US President George W. Bush over the Iraq War in 2003 did not change Germany's basic commitment to the West and to the transatlantic alliance—and certainly not its commitment to the EU. *Westbindung* was never seriously questioned. Therefore, in 2005, Merkel could quickly repair the German–American relationship.

Scholz's *Zeitenwende* in 2022 reconfirmed Germany's commitment to the West. While his policy of hesitation before the Russian invasion was based on the desire to keep diplomatic channels open and Germany's gas supply running, he was in basic agreement with other western leaders about the deplorability of Putin's policy. With his speech, Scholz underlined Berlin's commitment to European defence, NATO and interoperability with the allies, and he thus cemented Germany's place among the western nations. *Westbindung* remains a constant in German foreign policy. If anything, it was rejuvenated by *Zeitenwende*.

Like *Westbindung*, Germany's commitment to European integration has been central to the country's identity since the continent emerged from the ruins of the Second World War.²⁵ This policy, initially focused on economic integration alone, was intended to ameliorate the historic animosities prevalent on the continent and to permit the economic recovery of European nations as a basis for lasting peace. Central to this project was a close relationship between Germany and France, as well as an implicit acknowledgement by both countries that France would often lead European integration.²⁶ But even after reunification, Germany's membership of and support for the EU remained a cornerstone of foreign policy and one that enjoyed overwhelming public support.²⁷ Therefore, when the EU was in a state of permanent crisis in the 2010s, Germany was often criticized for not showing enough leadership or vision, and for stalling rather than pushing European cooperation. Yet the decisions taken by the German government at this time must be understood in the context of the substantial domestic reluctance to bail out southern European countries. Any such efforts would have seriously endangered German electoral support for any government, and possibly even for the EU itself. Merkel saw austerity—a rejection of eurobonds, and insistence on following the euro rules—as an instrument to keep the EU alive and to maintain its current

²⁴ Alexander von Plato, *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands—ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel. Bush, Kohl, Gorbatschow und die internen Gesprächsprotokolle* (Berlin: Links, 2010); Andreas Rödter, *Deutschland einig Vaterland: die Geschichte der Wiedervereinigung* (Munich: Beck, 2009).

²⁵ Indeed, it is written into art. 23 of the constitution.

²⁶ Paterson, 'The reluctant hegemon?', pp. 57–64.

²⁷ Constanze Stelzenmüller, 'Germany: between power and responsibility', in William Hitchcock, Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, eds, *Shaper nations: strategies for a changing world* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 58–60.

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shape.²⁸ These policies, contentious and ineffective as they might have been, were a continuation of Germany's pledge to European integration.²⁹ This commitment was also evident during the Brexit negotiations where, much to London's dismay, Merkel ensured that there was unity in the European negotiating position *vis-à-vis* the UK.³⁰ Recently, the COVID-19 crisis again underscored Germany's support for European integration. When the EU proposed to borrow money itself to set up a gigantic recovery fund, Merkel did not object. This was remarkable as it crossed one of Germany's dearly held red lines: it was a communization of debt—or eurobonds—in all but name. Even more astonishing, the plan was designed by France and Germany together to maintain European solidarity and integration.³¹

Zeitenwende marked another strong German sign of support for Europe. With Germany's foreign policy shift of 27 February 2022, a major obstacle to closer European integration in security and defence policy had been removed. Moreover, Scholz explicitly highlighted how important the EU was for Germany, calling it Germany's 'framework for action'. European integration has been a basic pillar of German postwar foreign policy, and it will continue to remain just that.

Multilateralism, the rules-based international order and NATO

Before 1949, Germany often pursued its own way (*Sonderweg*). However, this notion was shattered twice within the course of 30 years. Hence, one of the lessons after the Second World War—for both German states—was never to be alone again. Because military power was so discredited by the Nazis, West German foreign policy after 1945 also had a strong focus on a legalistic—rather than a military—approach. Therefore, promoting international law and a rules-based conduct of international relations were priorities for German foreign policy. The only purpose of the military was to defend Germany and its allies against invasion.³² Strong support for multilateralism and international organizations was the consequence of Germany's history and its restrained position within the international Cold War system. Being a member of the EU, UN and NATO was quite literally written into the West German DNA—its constitution.³³ After reunification, multilateralism remained a cornerstone of foreign policy, sporadic hiccups notwithstanding.³⁴ Occasionally, Berlin would even

²⁸ Hanns W. Maull, 'Reflective, hegemonic, geo-economic, civilian . . . ? The puzzle of German power', *German Politics* 27: 4, 2018, p. 462; Kai Oppermann, 'Between a rock and a hard place? Navigating domestic and international expectations on German foreign policy', *German Politics* 28: 3, 2019, p. 488.

²⁹ See also e.g. Kenneth Dyson, *States, debt, and power: 'saints' and 'sinners' in history and European integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 629–31.

³⁰ Oppermann, 'Between a rock and a hard place?', p. 489.

³¹ Jakob Eberle and Alister Miskimmon, 'Conclusion: German foreign policy in the (post-)corona world', *German Politics* 30: 1, 2021, p. 141.

³² Harald Müller, 'Diplomatie als Instrument deutscher Außenpolitik', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 66: 28–9, 2016, pp. 27–8; Matthijs, 'The three faces of German leadership', p. 152.

³³ Crawford and Olsen, 'The puzzle of persistence and power', p. 602; Hillebrand, 'Germany and the new global order'.

³⁴ For instance in 2011, when Germany was unsupportive of western airstrikes against Libya and thus isolated among its allies: see e.g. Simon Tisdall, 'Germany blocks plans for Libya no-fly zone', *Guardian*, 15 March 2011.

coordinate western responses, for example during the 2014 Ukraine crisis.³⁵ Aside from multilateralism, the law-based conduct of international affairs is a further cornerstone of Germany's foreign policy. During the Cold War, the limited sovereignty Germany possessed and its dependence on the superpowers for security and unification, combined with a lack of (and lack of willingness to use) more direct instruments of power politics—such as the military—meant that Germany relied heavily on international law to pursue its interests to fruition.³⁶ This tradition continued after reunification. As former foreign minister (and now Federal President) Frank-Walter Steinmeier said in 2016: 'Whenever possible, we choose *Recht* (law) over *Macht* (power)'.³⁷ Multilateralism and respect for international law are also supported by a broad consensus among parties in parliament and across society. 'Never alone' remains a fundamental value of German foreign policy, and *Zeitenwende* reaffirmed this principle. In his speech, Scholz explicitly rejected Putin's power-based mission to re-erect an empire: 'We will never accept the use of force as a political instrument'.³⁸ Even more explicitly, Scholz set multilateral cooperation at the centre of *Zeitenwende*:

Our greatest strength is our alliances! It is to them that we owe the great fortune our country has enjoyed for over thirty years ... we must do everything we can to maintain the cohesion of the European Union, the strength of NATO, to forge even closer relations with our friends, our partners and all those who share our convictions worldwide.³⁹

Multilateralism and an international order based on the principles of international law will thus continue to be essential pillars of German foreign policy. *Zeitenwende* clearly recommit Germany to these notions.

NATO is another multilateral setting that has traditionally been extremely important to Germany. While the organization was designed, as its first Secretary-General Hastings Ismay allegedly said, 'to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down',⁴⁰ during the Cold War, West Germany's very survival depended on the credibility of the collective defence promise enshrined in NATO. When the Cold War came to an end, however, Germany was less reliant on NATO. Although the country paid continuous diplomatic lip service to its existence, the alliance's new out-of-area missions were eyed sceptically in Germany. It took persistent pressure from allies, several crises and a nudge from the constitutional court in 1994 to persuade German governments to accept that conflicts had changed in the post-Cold War world. Germany now had to move beyond a focus purely on territorial defence and to intervene outside NATO territory, for instance in Kosovo in 1999 or in Afghanistan in 2001.⁴¹ At the same

³⁵ See e.g. Hyde-Price, 'The "sleep-walking giant" awakes', pp. 601, 607–10.

³⁶ See e.g. Stelzenmüller, 'Germany: between power and responsibility', p. 55.

³⁷ Steinmeier, 'Germany's new global role', p. 110.

³⁸ Scholz, 'Policy statement', 27 Feb. 2022.

³⁹ Scholz, 'Policy statement', 27 Feb. 2022.

⁴⁰ See for instance Josef Joffe, 'NATO: soldiering on', *Time*, 19 March 2009.

⁴¹ As then Defence Minister Peter Struck proclaimed in 2004: '[Germany's] security is ... also defended in the Hindu Kush': Peter Struck, 'Regierungserklärung des Bundesministers für Verteidigung', Bundesregierung, de, 11 March 2004, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/bulletin/regierungserklaerung-des-bundesministers-fuer-verteidigung-dr-peter-struck--792688>.

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time, Berlin was often criticized for not supporting NATO enough in terms of the Bundeswehr's capabilities, manpower or budget.⁴² Consequently, Germany was often seen as a security 'free-rider' and the 'weakest link in the Western alliance'.⁴³ Scholz's speech marked a break with this persistent trend in post-Cold War German politics. He reiterated a strong commitment to the western alliance, and—even more significantly—promised to increase the German defence budget markedly and to raise annual military spending to more than 2 per cent of GDP, in addition to setting up a special fund of 100 billion euro. *Zeitenwende* thus marked the point when the German leadership acknowledged that it had under-spent on its military and had a Bundeswehr that was largely unfit for purpose. The speech also made the ability to defend Europe a priority (again).⁴⁴ As Scholz emphasized, 'we need aeroplanes that fly, ships that can set out to sea and soldiers who are optimally equipped for their missions'.⁴⁵ With his speech, Scholz not only provided concrete budgetary benchmarks but also highlighted the need for interoperability of Germany's new weapon systems with those of NATO allies. Certainly, *Zeitenwende* actively revived Germany's commitment to and support for NATO. With it, the government accepted the changed security landscape and the resurrected possibility of large-scale war in Europe.

Hesitant leadership

Many of the controversies around German foreign policy focus on its attitude towards 'power', 'responsibility' or 'leadership'—the so-called 'German problem'.⁴⁶ Berlin is often perceived to be shying away from leadership. In that vein, Germany is described as not 'normal' in that it does not seek the international responsibility and the international influence commensurate with its standing as one of the most advanced economies and the most populous country in Europe.⁴⁷ As Simon Bulmer and William Paterson observed in 2013, Germany is a 'reluctant hegemon'. The country's influence is mainly based on its economic strength, while the public and political classes alike are largely opposed to any hegemonic ambitions.⁴⁸ This hesitancy extends to leadership aspirations, too.

When analysing this constant feature of Germany foreign policy, it is important to emphasize the hesitation, rather than the lack of leadership. In fact, Germany

⁴² Patrick Keller, 'Germany in NATO: the status quo ally', *Survival* 54: 3, 2012, pp. 95–110.

⁴³ Mark Leonard and Jonathan Hackenbroich, *The birth of a geopolitical Germany*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 28 Feb. 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-birth-of-a-geopolitical-germany/>.

⁴⁴ As a report from the ministry of defence realized as late as December 2021: Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Bericht zur materiellen Einsatzbereitschaft der Hauptwaffensysteme der Bundeswehr II/2021*, 15 Dec. 2021, <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5325364/11a1d50cce70b7b1a8307adc16991f4d/download-bericht-zur-materiellen-einsatzbereitschaft-2-2021-data.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Scholz, 'Policy statement', 27 Feb. 2022.

⁴⁶ David Calleo, *The German problem reconsidered: Germany and the world order 1870 to the present*, rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Blumenau, 'German foreign policy and the "German problem"'.
⁴⁷ For some discussion of what it would mean for Germany to be 'normal' and why it is not yet, see Klaus Brummer and Kai Oppermann, *Germany's foreign policy after the end of the Cold War: 'becoming normal?'*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴⁸ Simon Bulmer and William E. Paterson, 'Germany as the EU's reluctant hegemon? Of economic strength and political constraints', *Journal of European Public Policy* 20: 10, 2013, pp. 1387–1405.

has led several times, especially within Europe. Yet often it does not assume leadership on its own initiative, but is pushed into it, accepting it only with hesitation and delay. The reasons for this reluctance are historical. During the first half of the twentieth century Germany actively and often aggressively sought hegemony. After the Second World War, the constrictions that the Cold War system imposed on Bonn, in addition to the Nazi legacy, left little room for it to exert leadership. Yet, within these constraints West Germany identified the niches where it could operate: economic policies were one, and European integration another. The latter was a perfect opportunity for West Germany to redeem itself and to accommodate neighbouring states' fears of German power. European integration was also a vehicle by which to exert influence—but only in concert with France, not on its own.⁴⁹ Moreover, as an economic powerhouse, the Federal Republic saw regional and global economic policies as a natural field in which to operate, along with efforts to strengthen international law. Here, Bonn could yield influence, seek occasional leadership and gain prestige.⁵⁰ Surprisingly to many, even after reunification, Kohl and his successors continued to shy away from seeking leadership in Europe.⁵¹ Thus, when there was a need—and open calls—for a quick and decisive German response to the euro crisis in the late 2000s, Merkel adopted a matter-of-fact approach to crisis management to maintain the status quo of European integration but did not breathe new life into a stalling integration project.⁵² The then Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski expressed his—and many others'—exasperation at this when he said: 'I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear its inactivity. You have become Europe's indispensable nation. You may not fail to lead.'⁵³

Germany hesitates to show leadership because of the associated costs—financial and economic, or possibly in terms of body bags, when military intervention is needed. Highly ambitious foreign policy agendas must be sold to the electorate, and the German public has historically been sceptical about a higher profile for its country. As Hanns Maull has put it, 'it is far from clear to what extent German society really stands behind the ambitions of a "responsible" power once the going gets difficult and the bills come in'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, even before the Ukraine war in 2022, constant pressures from European and transatlantic partners have led to a growing, yet uneasy, awareness in Germany that the country would have to play a more prominent leadership role in the future.⁵⁵ There were also efforts by foreign policy elites to steer the domestic debate in this direction, but the reluctance among the general public has persisted.⁵⁶ When Germany did exert leadership in the recent past—eventually in the euro crisis, during the 2014 Crimea invasion or

⁴⁹ Paterson, 'The reluctant hegemon?', pp. 58–64.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Bernhard Blumenau, *The United Nations and terrorism: Germany, multilateralism, and antiterrorism efforts in the 1970s* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Stelzenmüller, 'Germany: between power and responsibility', pp. 55–7.

⁵¹ Paterson, 'The reluctant hegemon?', pp. 58–64.

⁵² Paterson, 'The reluctant hegemon?', pp. 65–6.

⁵³ Radosław Sikorski, 'I fear Germany's power less than her inactivity', *Financial Times*, 28 Nov. 2011.

⁵⁴ Maull, 'Reflective, hegemonic, geo-economic, civilian . . .?', pp. 474–5.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Steinmeier, 'Germany's new global role'.

⁵⁶ Oppermann, 'Between a rock and a hard place?'.

Zeitenwende and the traditional pillars of German foreign policy

in the 2015 refugee crisis—this was often as a consequence of huge pressures, and other European powers’ inability to lead. Others, then, were ‘putting Germany in a default leadership position’,⁵⁷ but Berlin did not seek it. Even when war came knocking at Germany’s back door, during the Ukraine crisis of 2021–2, the Merkel and subsequent Scholz governments were reluctant to lead European responses to Putin’s escalating aggression. Quite the opposite, indeed; Germany was perceived to be preventing more resolute action.⁵⁸ And while the German government did join global efforts to resolve the crisis through diplomacy, it did not lead them.

In his *Zeitenwende* speech, Scholz did promise more resolute action to secure and defend Europe. However, while there was room for German leadership in designing the next steps of European integration and defence against Russia, Scholz remained silent on the specifics. He did not lead with a new vision for Europe; his speech was focused on the changes Germany itself had to implement. In this respect, *Zeitenwende* confirmed the hesitancy about leadership underpinning much of Germany’s traditional foreign policy. It is preoccupied with securing the status quo but does little to propose visions of how the future of Europe would look and how to get there. Those more visionary moments are normally left to the French. As Matthias Matthijs observed, ‘German desire for leadership needs to match its destiny to lead’;⁵⁹ and to date it does not. In the aftermath of his speech, Scholz continued to reject a leadership role within Europe, and, partly for reasons detailed below, he remained hesitant about further sanctions on Russia (for instance on gas) and reluctant to visit Ukraine.⁶⁰ Interestingly, though, this refusal of leadership was now coming under criticism from people within his own coalition.⁶¹ That criticism might indicate a growing awareness among political elites, including the foreign minister,⁶² that Germany now has to show more leadership. This need will become even more pressing if anti-European parties continue to gain ground in Europe, for instance in France. Scholz’s address to the Bundestag in June 2022 did indeed show some initiative as he proposed a ‘new Marshall Plan’ for Ukraine.⁶³ Yet the details of such a programme remain to be elaborated, and it is unclear whether Scholz will be able to convince his colleagues of his idea and to implement it. To date, then, and despite *Zeitenwende*, Germany remains a hesitant leader—at best.

Ostpolitik and Wandel durch Handel

Germany’s relationship with Russia (and previously with the Soviet Union) is a complex one. While close contacts had existed before 1933, the Second World War saw the two countries wreak destruction on each other. After the war, the Soviet

⁵⁷ Stelzenmüller, ‘Germany: between power and responsibility’, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Oliver Moody, ‘When Ukraine wants guns, Germany sends helmets’, *The Times*, 26 Jan. 2022.

⁵⁹ Matthijs, ‘The three faces of German leadership’, p. 152.

⁶⁰ See the back-and-forth around Scholz’s trip to Ukraine, which only occurred on 16 June, and which he finally conducted together with Emmanuel Macron (France), Mario Draghi (Italy) and Klaus Iohannis (Romania).

⁶¹ ‘Deutsche Ukraine-Politik: Hofreiter sieht “das Problem im Kanzleramt”’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 14 April 2022.

⁶² Hans von der Burchard, ‘Germany’s Baerbock calls for “heavy weapons” for Ukraine’, *Politico*, 11 April 2022.

⁶³ ‘Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz will “Marshall-Plan” für Wiederaufbau der Ukraine’, *Deutscher Bundestag*, 22 June 2022, <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2022/kw25-de-regierungserklaerung-897774>.

Union was one of the four occupying powers on whose approval all prospects for German reunification hinged. Yet during the Cold War this was an unlikely prospect, and in the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany did not engage much with Moscow at all. Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* of the 1970s represented West Germany's first proactive approach to the Soviets, in the hope that this would lead to change (*Wandel durch Annäherung*).⁶⁴ It was because of *Ostpolitik* that, after the end of the Soviet Union, Germany arguably had the most influence on Russia of all western nations. While the United States was seen as the remaining superpower, boasting of its victory, Germany's history of engagement with the Soviets and its restrained and not power-hungry foreign policy won it favours in Moscow. The focus on trade—as discussed below—also helped, as it enriched the new economic and political elites in Russia.⁶⁵ *Ostpolitik* thus continued, and Germany saw itself as the broker between Russia and the West. The Germans also lobbied for Russia's inclusion into the main global economic bodies and supported Moscow when it was in financial trouble.

The heyday of European–Russian relations ended in 2006. From then on, the prospect of Russia using Europe's huge dependency on its gas as a potential instrument of blackmail loomed ever more threateningly. Even so, consecutive German governments continued *Ostpolitik* and engaged with Russia, trying to tie it into European institutions and restraints, and thereby tame Putin.⁶⁶ Merkel, for instance, acknowledged the existence of a 'strategic partnership ... particularly on energy issues'.⁶⁷ Energy was indeed at the core of Berlin's policy *vis-à-vis* Putin. Against the backdrop of an already heavy dependence on Russian fossil fuels, Germany still pushed forward with plans for yet another pipeline linking it directly to the Russian gas fields: Nord Stream 2. With hindsight, the notion of ever closer economic ties with Russia was the Achilles heel of *Ostpolitik*. Trade was meant to deter Putin from aggressive power politics, but it increased Germany's dependence on cheap Russian gas and other raw materials. *Ostpolitik*, a policy once designed to increase West Germany's global room for manoeuvre, severely restricted it in the 2020s. The problem that the German government faced after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was precisely that it did want to pursue a much tougher policy on Putin, including sanctions against Russian oil and gas; yet the increased dependence on these fuels meant that such boycotts would come at huge costs for Germany's industry and population.⁶⁸ And indeed, petrol and gas prices—among others—skyrocketed in the aftermath of the Russian invasion.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik*, pp. 116–40.

⁶⁵ Lilia Shevtsova, 'Falle Ostpolitik. Ein Blick aus Russland auf die deutsche Außenpolitik', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 66: 28–9, 2016, pp. 19–20.

⁶⁶ 'Der Bundespräsident: interview mit dem ZDF-Morgenmagazin', 5 April 2022, <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Interviews/2022/220405-Interview-moma-vor-ort.html>.

⁶⁷ Alexander Rahr, 'Germany and Russia: a special relationship', *Washington Quarterly* 30: 2, 2007, pp. 137–42. Merkel recently defended her policy on Nord Stream 2 again; see 'Merkel verteidigt Nord-Stream-2-Entscheidung', *tagesschau.de*, 18 June 2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/merkel-nord-stream-2-105.html>.

⁶⁸ Christopher F. Schuetze, 'Germany's leader says a boycott of Russian energy would imperil "hundreds of thousands of jobs"', *New York Times*, 23 March 2022.

⁶⁹ Christoph Sackmann, 'Die Kriegsinflation: diese 11 Produkte haben sich stark verteuert', *FOCUS Online*, 2 June 2022, https://www.focus.de/finanzen/news/konjunktur/nicht-nur-oel-gas-und-sprit-die-kriegsinflation-diese-11-produkte-hat-der-ukraine-krieg-am-staerksten-verteuert_id_101221970.html.

The notion of *Wandel durch Handel* (change through trade) is thus a topic closely related to *Ostpolitik*. In fact, Brandt's *Ostpolitik* already had a strong commercial dimension.⁷⁰ And since the 1960s, it had faced criticism from the United States and other allies. Nevertheless, subsequent German chancellors pushed ahead with a suite of pipeline deals in the 1970s and 1980s and—the most infamous, Nord Stream 2—in the early 2000s.⁷¹ *Wandel durch Handel* has been motivated by the hope that 'engagement would slowly modernize Russia and lead to eventual political liberalization, or at least to a system based on the rule of law'.⁷² But this approach resulted in deliberately downplaying—or being unable to properly address—concerns about Russia's progressively authoritarian course.⁷³ This is not to say that the basic assumption underpinning *Wandel durch Handel*—other than making profits—is wrong by default. It relies on liberal theories in which increased economic interdependence would make war less likely and would—over time—lead to cooperation and an alignment of policies.⁷⁴ In essence, *Wandel durch Handel* was supposed to work as another successful European integration story, this time in the east of the continent. The problem is that the strategy relied on Putin being primarily interested in more trade. *Wandel durch Handel* does not work when, as for Putin, trade is only an instrument for geopolitical ambitions.⁷⁵ Germany's misplaced hope was hence that Russia would see the world like Germany did—as one in which cooperation brings gains for all—and not, ultimately, as a zero-sum game.

This idealistic view and German *Ostpolitik* often put Berlin at odds with those allies promoting a more restrictive approach to Russia.⁷⁶ Yet the doctrine of *Wandel durch Handel* was hard to kill. The first major shift occurred in 2014 after the Russian annexation of Crimea, when Berlin gave up its 'in-between' approach and positioned itself explicitly against Russia.⁷⁷ Germany's resolute push for sanctions against Russia was a break with formerly more mellow approaches and as such was unexpected in Moscow.⁷⁸ Yet it was a policy of carrot and stick, rather than outright deterrence; right up to February 2022, Germany wanted 'to keep Russia at bay but also [to] find a modus vivendi with Moscow that eventually would allow a return to a co-operative pan-European security order'.⁷⁹ There was still a hope that Russia could become a peaceful, law-abiding resident of the Common European House.⁸⁰

⁷⁰ Shevtsova, 'Falle Ostpolitik', p. 19.

⁷¹ Gregor Schöllgen, 'Brandts Röhren, Putins Gas', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 26 Jan. 2017.

⁷² Stephen F. Szabo, 'Germany: from civilian power to a geo-economic shaping power', *German Politics and Society* 35: 3, 2017, p. 44.

⁷³ Szabo, 'Germany', p. 44.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Patrick J. McDonald, 'Peace through trade or free trade?', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48: 4, 2004, pp. 547–72. The notion can also be seen in EU foreign relations; see Amir M. Kamel, *The political economy of EU ties with Iraq and Iran: an assessment of the trade–peace relationship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), ch. 2.

⁷⁵ Angela Stent, 'The Putin Doctrine', *Foreign Affairs*, 27 Jan. 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-01-27/putin-doctrine>.

⁷⁶ Müller, 'Diplomatie als Instrument deutscher Außenpolitik', p. 29.

⁷⁷ Oppermann, 'Between a rock and a hard place?', p. 490.

⁷⁸ Shevtsova, 'Falle Ostpolitik', p. 21.

⁷⁹ Maull, 'Reflective, hegemonic, geo-economic, civilian . . .?', p. 463.

⁸⁰ Shevtsova, 'Falle Ostpolitik', p. 20; Stelzenmüller, 'Germany: between power and responsibility', p. 64.

The Ukraine crisis of 2022 completely annihilated Germany's *Ostpolitik*. Steinmeier, who was foreign minister before becoming president, acknowledged as much:

It is very sad but we failed in many ways. We failed to build a Common European House ... we failed to integrate Russia into a European security system, we failed to ... help Russia onto a path towards democracy and human rights.⁸¹

With his *Zeitenwende* speech, Scholz too implicitly acknowledged that *Ostpolitik* had failed. But Scholz also highlighted in his speech that dialogue and diplomacy would continue, as they must with an important state.⁸² Moreover, he distinguished between Putin's policies and the stance of the broader Russian public as he expressed his hope that 'freedom, tolerance and human rights will prevail in Russia, too'. Nevertheless, Berlin will now have to design a completely new approach towards Russia. The policy will likely be less illusionary and more matter-of-fact, as it will be influenced by both disappointment and distrust. In June, Scholz confirmed as much as he predicted 'a long ice age' between Moscow and Berlin and stated that a return to a pre-invasion relationship with Putin was 'unthinkable'. Yet still he did not set out in detail what the new policy towards Russia would be.⁸³ *Ostpolitik* is the German foreign policy tradition in which *Zeitenwende* will necessitate the most fundamental changes.

At the same time, *Wandel durch Handel* is also discredited. It is important to note, though, that it was practised not just towards Russia but also towards China and other states. Germany's greater economic dependence on China, coupled with the longer distance to it and to Taiwan, might be a reason that some form of *Wandel durch Handel* will continue, at least in the short term. Realistically, there are also few immediate alternatives available, even though the track record of *Wandel durch Handel* in China is no more impressive than in respect of Russia. At the same time, the Chinese leadership, thus far, has an interest in frictionless trade. So there may be room for some optimism that trade could indeed restrain China. These are big 'ifs', and *Zeitenwende* might indeed change Germany's China policy too. What it has done already is radically alter *Ostpolitik*, and with it, the German notion of *Wandel durch Handel* in Europe.

Non-military foreign policy

With the end of the Second World War came the end of German military might; one of the most successful allied policies in postwar Germany was that of demilitarization. Consequently, when the Bundeswehr was founded against the backdrop of the Korean War (1950–53), it caused a great deal of controversy within West Germany.⁸⁴ These disputes were also a prelude to one of the most profound tradi-

⁸¹ 'Der Bundespräsident: interview mit dem ZDF-Morgenmagazin' (author's translation).

⁸² In June 2022, Scholz recommitted himself to keeping the dialogue with Putin open; see Lisa-Marie Eckardt, 'Olaf Scholz: "Es ist absolut notwendig, mit Putin zu sprechen"', *Die Zeit*, 17 June 2022.

⁸³ 'Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz will "Marshall-Plan" für Wiederaufbau der Ukraine'.

⁸⁴ For a detailed account, see Klaus von Schubert, *Wiederbewaffnung und Westintegration: die innere Auseinanderset-*

tions in postwar German foreign affairs: an anti-militarist policy coupled with chequebook diplomacy and the rejection of the use of military force and interventions in external affairs. In light of the daunting legacy of the Second World War, for many Germans and most of their allies, the Bundeswehr's *raison d'être* was simply to strengthen NATO. Thus, when in the 1960s the US government asked West Germany to contribute soldiers to the Vietnam War, all Bonn was prepared to offer was to send the hospital ship *Helgoland* to Indochina.⁸⁵ The message was clear: Germany would not take part in out-of-area military missions.⁸⁶ With the end of the Cold War, Germans wanted to continue this policy. The country had grown comfortable in the 'security cocoon' that the US and NATO provided, and wanted to focus on the economic development of eastern Germany. Welfare state projects were prioritized over military spending as Germans wanted to cash in on the 'peace dividend'.⁸⁷ To counter US calls for a German 'partnership in leadership', the government continued chequebook diplomacy but remained reluctant to use, in the words of Carl von Clausewitz, 'war as a continuation of policy by other means'.⁸⁸ In fact, it was the German constitutional court, not the executive, that initiated a policy shift here. Presented with the question as to whether or not the Bundeswehr would be allowed to go on out-of-area missions,⁸⁹ the judges decided in 1994 that it could.⁹⁰ However, hesitation continued to prevail, and it took a great deal of pressure from NATO allies for newly elected Chancellor Gerhard Schröder to send Bundeswehr jets and troops into active combat in Kosovo in 1999—the first such fighting mission since the Second World War. This move definitely marked a major revision of the non-military and anti-interventionist—or 'civilian power'—tradition, but it did not end it. Despite Germany's contribution to the US-led war against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, military casualties and war weariness among the German electorate soon led to a return to a more restrained policy.⁹¹ In 2002–2003, Schröder's government thus resisted a UN mandate for a US-led invasion of Iraq and did not participate when the 'coalition of the willing' went there anyway.⁹² Likewise, roughly ten years later, Germany—now led by Merkel—would not partake in western military strikes against Gaddafi's Libya. This is not to say that Germany did not send soldiers abroad on UN-, NATO- or EU-sanctioned military missions at all. But those were relatively small-scale operations and

zung um die militärische und außenpolitische Orientierung der Bundesrepublik, 1950–1952 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1972).

⁸⁵ Alexander Troche, 'Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt': die Ostasienspolitik der Bundesrepublik in China, Taiwan und Süd-Vietnam, 1954–1966 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2001), pp. 293–98.

⁸⁶ Hacke, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 392.

⁸⁷ On the 'security cocoon' see N. Piers Ludlow, 'European integration and the Cold War', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds, *The Cambridge history of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); see also Müller, 'Diplomatie als Instrument deutscher Außenpolitik', p. 28.

⁸⁸ See e.g. 'Schritt für Schritt in den Krieg', *Der Spiegel*, 25 April 1993; Gaskarth and Oppermann, 'Clashing traditions', p. 93.

⁸⁹ i.e. those that do not immediately relate to Germany's territorial defence.

⁹⁰ But they imposed certain conditions, including an advance, enabling vote by the Bundestag. See e.g. Dieter Wiefelspütz, *Das Parlamentsheer: der Einsatz bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte im Ausland, der konstitutive Parlamentsvorbehalt und das Parlamentsbeteiligungsgesetz* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2005). On the bigger debates, see Gaskarth and Oppermann, 'Clashing traditions'; Bulmer and Paterson, 'Germany as the EU's reluctant hegemon?'

⁹¹ 'Germans overwhelmingly oppose war in Iraq poll', *Reuters*, 13 Nov. 2002.

⁹² John Hooper, 'German leader says no to Iraq war', *Guardian*, 6 Aug. 2002.

not comparable to the invasion-style engagement in Kosovo and Afghanistan.⁹³ German anti-militarism is thus relative, as Jamie Gaskarth and Kai Oppermann emphasize: ‘Germany’s identity as a civilian power is ultimately reliant on the contrasting militarism of the United States (and lesser powers such as the United Kingdom and France).’⁹⁴ Beverly Crawford and Kim Olsen concur:

Germany’s foreign policy approach differs significantly from traditional approaches to power in international relations, in that it rests on a moral commitment to a set of values and principles such as human rights, liberal democracy, and peaceful dispute resolution. This commitment creates a policy preference for civilian (as opposed to military) practices.⁹⁵

This means that Germany has remained much more reluctant than its partners to use military force in foreign policy.⁹⁶ Even when the European post-Cold War order seemed under threat in 2014, Germany’s primary response was one focused on diplomacy, multilateralism and economic sanctions—not military deterrence or weapons exports to Ukraine.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, the Crimean crisis of 2014 caused a rethink in German security and foreign policy circles. Since then, various presidents and ministers have called for Germany to be prepared to assume more international responsibility and leadership.⁹⁸ Yet in defence policies, not much changed: the underfunding of the Bundeswehr continued, and hesitation about using military means persisted. This presented a very German dilemma: while there was a consensus that civilian means should be used in security policy, much controversy existed around the use of the military, despite Germany’s partners calling for just that.⁹⁹ As then Foreign Minister Steinmeier said: ‘If Germany’s partners and allies walk an extra mile for diplomacy and negotiations, Germans want their government to walk one mile further, sometimes to our partners’ chagrin.’ And therefore, Germany ‘will resort to military engagement only after weighing every risk and every possible alternative’.¹⁰⁰

The predicament that the German government thus faced in 2022 was that ‘the Berlin Republic downgraded military force as an instrument of its statecraft and has relied both on the soft power of its multilateralism and social model and the hard power of economics’.¹⁰¹ These instruments failed to contain Putin’s expansionism. Therefore, Scholz’s *Zeitenwende* speech marked a significant shift. He acknowledged that an effective military was indispensable to counter Russian aggression, that hefty investments were needed to update the Bundeswehr, and that Germany would require ‘strength of our own’.¹⁰² Meanwhile, he also continued to stress the

⁹³ ‘Die aktuellen Einsätze im Überblick’, n.d., <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/einsaetze-bundeswehr>.

⁹⁴ Gaskarth and Oppermann, ‘Clashing traditions’, p. 92.

⁹⁵ Crawford and Olsen, ‘The puzzle of persistence and power’, p. 592. See also Leonard and Hackenbroich, ‘The birth of a geopolitical Germany’.

⁹⁶ Crawford and Olsen, ‘The puzzle of persistence and power’, p. 592.

⁹⁷ Szabo, ‘Germany’, pp. 45–6.

⁹⁸ See e.g. Steinmeier, ‘Germany’s new global role’.

⁹⁹ Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, ‘Von Libyen nach Syrien. Die Rolle des Militärs in einer neuen Deutschen Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 66: 28–9, 2016, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Steinmeier, ‘Germany’s new global role’, p. 110.

¹⁰¹ Szabo, ‘Germany’, p. 40.

¹⁰² Scholz, ‘Policy statement’, 27 Feb. 2022.

value of diplomacy, but emphasized that he did not want to keep ‘talking simply for the sake of talking’. Germany’s complex notion of security was underscored with his ‘awareness that the Bundeswehr alone does not have the means to contain all future threats. We therefore need strong development cooperation.’¹⁰³

Consequently, the *Zeitenwende* speech did not constitute a complete U-turn in Germany’s non-military tradition or its security policy. Scholz did recognize the continuing value of diplomacy and other means of conflict prevention. Yet the chancellor now openly admitted that a ‘powerful, cutting-edge, progressive Bundeswehr’ was also needed. This marked the end of Germany’s dream of a peaceful post-Cold War Europe and, to some extent, of pacifism. Scholz pronounced a *Machtwort* (as he put his foot down): to lawmakers, he presented a fait accompli. He openly endorsed the need for a strong Bundeswehr and ended years of debates on defence spending, weapon exports to crisis regions, armed drones, armament projects, nuclear participation and NATO’s 2 per cent goal. Most of the Bundestag applauded his plans—in the face of the Russian invasion no alternatives really existed, even for those who did not like the announcements. Consequently, in June 2022, by a vast majority, the Bundestag passed the €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr and changed the Basic Law—Germany’s constitution—to secure it for the future.¹⁰⁴ In doing so it both backed and cemented *Zeitenwende* and the radical changes to foreign and security policy it entailed, even though these changes would still have to be debated in detail.

In his *Zeitenwende* speech, the chancellor also endorsed another radical shift in foreign policy—one that occurred immediately after the Russian invasion on 24 February and would have been unthinkable before: Germany finally not only allowed other states to send German-origin weapons to Ukraine but decided to directly supply the country itself.¹⁰⁵ In contrast to earlier policy ruptures—*Ostpolitik* or reunification, for example—there were no concerns among Germany’s neighbours about these new policies. As Simon Tisdall wrote in the *Observer*: ‘For the first time since the Nazi era, Germany has begun to rearm—and Europe cheered. Extraordinary.’¹⁰⁶ Europeans are aware that Germany is not revisionist and does not try to change the status quo. In fact, Berlin is catching up with post-Cold War realities in order to *defend* the status quo. Moreover, even with the massive injection of money into the Bundeswehr, Germany will not become ‘a military juggernaut’.¹⁰⁷

Zeitenwende marks Germany’s reality check: its hopes that Europe could move beyond its troublesome, military past, could focus on trade and welfare, and would turn into a peaceful utopia were not to be. By acknowledging the need for

¹⁰³ Scholz, ‘Policy statement’, 27 Feb. 2022. The complex notion of security, including development, environmental and civilian tools, was enshrined in a 2006 ministry of defence white paper: see Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, *Weißbuch 2006 zur Sicherheitspolitik Deutschlands und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr*, 2006, http://archives.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr/2008/IMG/pdf/weissbuch_2006.pdf.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Eydlin, ‘Verteidigung: Bundestag beschließt Sondervermögen für Bundeswehr’, *Die Zeit*, 3 June 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Leonard and Hackenbroich, ‘The birth of a geopolitical Germany’, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Simon Tisdall, ‘How Ukraine has become the crucible of the new world order’, *Observer*, 12 March 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Shurkin, ‘How the Bundeswehr should spend its money’, *War on the Rocks*, 21 March 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/how-the-bundeswehr-should-spend-its-money/>.

military strength—if only to defend the European order—Scholz publicly broke a taboo; and he did so to cheering applause, within and outside the Bundestag. This in itself was a watershed.

Conclusions

German foreign policy is built on the premise of stability and on core traditional notions of how to conduct foreign affairs. This makes it difficult for the country to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, especially on questions related to war and peace. The tendency of the German political system to produce coalition governments adds another layer of complication, as changes have to be carefully negotiated among the governing parties. Even so, Scholz's *Zeitenwende* speech broke with several key traditions that had underpinned German foreign policy for decades. The most seriously affected ones were *Ostpolitik* and the closely associated strategy of *Wandel durch Handel*, along with the determination to pursue a foreign policy that did not rely on military means.

Ostpolitik was guided by the conviction—now deemed naive—that Russia could be democratized and turned into a serious partner by entangling it with European processes, as well as increasing its economic ties with Europe.¹⁰⁸ This hope was not borne out, and *Ostpolitik* today lies in ruins. So does the notion of *Wandel durch Handel*, as Berlin is desperately trying to wean itself off Russian fossil fuels. Once again, Germany was in the uncomfortable position of being heavily criticized by its partners for not supporting stronger sanctions against Moscow. Yet, in contrast to the pre-invasion period, these hesitations did not derive from foreign policy strategies. The hopes that Russia could be contained by diplomacy and trade links died on the Ukrainian battlefields. Now, the German government was trying to avoid an immediate halt in supplies of Russian gas that could catapult the country into its biggest economic, industrial and social crisis since the Second World War; a crisis that could lead to cataclysmic consequences for stability and prosperity in Germany and across Europe.¹⁰⁹ Avoiding further sanctions was thus the consequence not of a foreign policy doctrine but of sheer necessity. *Wandel durch Handel*—while not yet dead *vis-à-vis* other regions of the world—is seriously discredited.

Perhaps even more importantly, *Zeitenwende* also marked the end of a period when Germans considered a large-scale war in central Europe impossible and the pursuit of a strong Bundeswehr and defence capability neglectable. Military means did not figure much in foreign policy thinking, certainly not as far as Europe was concerned. Scholz now confirmed that military security was crucial, and that Germany would have to do much more to defend itself as well as Europe's freedom. This will require sacrifices and a large amount of money. It will also necessitate a serious rethink of the traditional conduct of external affairs, which largely rejected the inclusion of military considerations in foreign policy-making.

¹⁰⁸ 'Der Bundespräsident: interview mit dem ZDF-Morgenmagazin'.

¹⁰⁹ Kate Connolly, "'Firms will go bust': Germany prepares for a future without Russian gas", *Guardian*, 9 April 2022.

Zeitenwende and the traditional pillars of German foreign policy

As such, it was a hard speech for an SPD chancellor to make. And while the *Zeitenwende* speech was only the beginning of a process of change, it also marked a point of no return. No major non-fringe party questioned its basic premises. Two examples demonstrate just how much the country had changed within a matter of weeks: first, politicians from the SPD's coalition partners, most notably from the Greens—which had emerged from the peace movement of the 1980s—were now calling fervently for more heavy weapons to be sent to Ukraine, while Scholz was more hesitant.¹¹⁰ By July 2022, however, Germany had started delivering a great variety of materiel, including heavy weapons such as the Panzerhaubitze 2000.¹¹¹ Second, as mentioned above, members from all parties save the Left party supported the special €100 billion fund for the Bundeswehr and wrote it into the constitution.¹¹² Both developments would have been unthinkable just weeks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. In these three pillars of historical German foreign policy, *Zeitenwende* represented a clear break with convention.

But despite the changes inherent in it, *Zeitenwende* also reconfirmed basic traditions in German foreign policy: multilateralism, cooperation and collective security, the pursuit of a rules-based international order, and European integration are all here to stay. Moreover, the chancellor underlined that Germany was firmly anchored in the West; there was no hint of desire for a German *Sonderweg*.

The Ukraine crisis demonstrated how far Europe, and Germany, had come. None of Berlin's neighbours voiced concerns over the huge increase in its defence spending, which 30 years earlier would have set off alarm bells in many European capitals. Now, they welcomed the defence budget hike as well as the massive military rearmament project. The reasons for this change in attitude lay in the very success of the major traditional pillars of German foreign policy. Because of its former conduct, Germany was not seen as a threat any more.¹¹³ Over decades, the country had successfully normalized its relations with the world by pursuing multilateralism, rejecting military power politics, and emphasizing *Recht* over *Macht*. European integration and transatlantic defence cooperation had been fundamental to postwar German foreign policies, no matter which government conducted them. Scholz reiterated Germany's strong support for these principles and endorsed the associated traditions.

Zeitenwende thus confirmed and revived Germany's successful foreign policy traditions while offering an opportunity to get rid of the more problematic ones. It was Germany's reckoning with the realities of Europe in the 2020s and, therefore, *Zeitenwende* clearly represented a watershed. It set the parameters for Germany's foreign policy for the next decade.

¹¹⁰ Philip Oltermann, 'German chancellor "stalling on heavy weaponry to Ukraine"', *Guardian*, 14 April 2022.

¹¹¹ An up-to-date list of what materiel has been delivered can be found at Bundesregierung, *Militärische Unterstützungsleistungen für die Ukraine*, 2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/krieg-in-der-ukraine/lieferungen-ukraine-2054514>.

¹¹² Eydlin, 'Verteidigung: Bundestag beschließt Sondervermögen für Bundeswehr'.

¹¹³ In fact, in many global polls over the past years, it was ranked as one of the best-regarded countries. See e.g. Oliver Moody, 'Best country in the world? Germany keeps title for fifth year as UK drops', *The Times*, 4 Nov. 2021.