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Andreas Berns

How Credible Is Our Value-Based Foreign and Security Policy?

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GIDS
German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies
Bundeswehr Command and Staff College [Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr]
Manteuffelstraße 20·22587 Hamburg·Germany
Phone: +49 (0)40 8667 6801
buero@gids-hamburg.de·www.gids-hamburg.de

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Dr Andreas Berns | Bundeswehr Command and Staff College

How Credible Is Our Value-Based Foreign and Security Policy?

Prologue

Following the elections for the 20th German Bundestag on 26 September 2021 and the subsequent exploratory and coalition negotiations, the coalition agreement of the new Federal Government was presented on 24 November 2021,¹ covering ‘Foreign Affairs, Security, Defence, Development, Human Rights’² in the subchapter of Chapter VII³. It states that the government will work toward ‘preserving our liberal way of life in Europe and protecting peace and human rights around the world’ and: ‘Our values and interests guide us in this process.’⁴ But what does this mean for German foreign and security policy?

On the importance of values in politics, the Eckhard Lübke, former advisor to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, said that the Chancellor believed that values alone did not constitute a definite compass for action but rather resulted in a weighing process based on reason⁵, which would equal a constant balancing act. This illustrates that former Federal Chancellor Schmidt’s foreign and security policy – not least influenced by the ideas of sociologist Max Weber, in particular – was more based on ethics of responsibility⁶ and less on ethics of conviction⁷. Therefore, the question arises whether, according to Lübke, Germany ‘as a power called to co-lead Europe’ must now also feel obliged to adhere to this principle of balance ‘and the corresponding weighing processes more than before’.⁸

Against the backdrop of rivalry with autocratic or totalitarian regimes of the present world, such as China or Russia, that violate human rights or fundamental freedoms and, by expanding the projection of their power, put massive international pressure on the largely free and liberal democracies founded on the rule of law, is it not all the more required to demonstrate a clear commitment to the values that define our self-image?

This would be of significant relevance to German foreign and security policy, since it is significantly influenced by Germany’s historical responsibility, mindful of the time of hegemonic Nazi dictatorship. For the ‘modern constitutional state may be secular and ideologically neutral,’ as Oberreuter said, but ‘this [or our] state is not value-neutral, [because] the Basic Law was consciously [sic!] drafted as a “value-based order” in response to the moral relativism of the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist

1 Cf. SPD / Bündnis 90/Die Grünen / FDP 2021.

2 Ibid.: 143–158.

3 Cf. ibid.: 130–158.

4 Ibid.: 143.

5 Cf. Schmidt 1982: 138f., cited in: Lübke 2021: 20.

6 According to Robert Spaemann, Max Weber understood the term ‘ethics of responsibility’ as ‘the attitude of a person who, in their actions, takes into account the entirety of likely consequences, who therefore considers which consequences are ideal in terms of the value they have in the real world and who acts accordingly, even if that means doing something which would be considered bad if treated without context’. Spaemann 1982 :63. See also the primary source of Weber 1993: 51–67. Cf. also Klein/Schubert 2020.

7 Cf. Robert 1982: 61–72, esp. 63–66; Klein/Schubert 2020.

8 Schmidt 1982: 138f., cited in: Lübke 2021: 20.

destruction of values’.⁹ And the Federal Constitutional Court monitors ‘that [sic!] current policy does not develop in a way contrary to the basic values’.¹⁰ This means that the Federal Government’s safeguarding of its interests in shaping German foreign and security policy must not fundamentally contradict this primacy.

The following will look at the extent to which the development of German foreign and security policy after World War II – especially after the completion of German reunification in 1990 – has lived up to this aspiration and to what extent this requirement has guided the governments of the Federal Republic of Germany up to now. Furthermore, the question of consistency of a value-based foreign and security policy will be examined in more detail by looking at individual key relations of the Federal Republic of Germany. Does this firm self-expectation that German foreign and security policy is bound by values not lead to contradictions with national interests that are subject to *realpolitik*? Can such contradictions cause international irritation and a loss of trust, which then call into question Germany’s often expressed mantra of ‘consistency and predictability’¹¹? How credible was and is the commitment to values in German foreign and security policy? To what extent can existing inconsistencies in credibility (if applicable) be resolved or avoided in the future?

Based on the historical examination of Germany’s foreign and security policy and the analysis of individual key relations, the intent is to infer conclusions and essential elements of conceptual framework guidelines of German foreign and security policy, which are to ultimately lead to a discourse on the opportunities and limitations of political action from the perspective of political ethics. This introduction is intended to provide a starting point and, at the same time, an impulse for further scientific reflection, especially regarding areas in the context of political philosophy, in the field of tension between deontological and teleological (or consequentialist and utilitarian) ethics.¹²

1 Historically Motivated Value-Based Guidelines of German Foreign and Security Policy: the ‘Never Again’ Commitment¹³

The development of the Federal Republic of Germany’s foreign policy was profoundly influenced by the experiences of the war of aggression, the Holocaust and the collapse of the Third Reich, which lead to the division of the country and the complete loss of Germany’s sovereignty, so that the postulated ‘never again’ commitment resulted not only in a political reorientation, but basically also in a new, identity-generating self-image of the Federal Republic of Germany’s foreign policy. After the experience of destruction, guilt and suffering, many Germans had the intrinsic motivation to change and adopt a different attitude, but ultimately this self-image had been imposed on them by the Allies who liberated Germany from Hitler’s dictatorship and occupied it. This new self-image was an essential prerequisite for returning to the international community. In 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany gave itself a corresponding (new) canon of values with the German Basic Law, which has since then been the moral

9 Oberreuter 2006.

10 Ibid.

11 Cf. Haftendorn 2012: 15–25.

12 See Weber 1919 and Weber 1993; on Weber, see also Verstraeten 1995: 180–187; cf. also Ahrens 1989: 825–844; cf. Meyer 2017 and Schedel 2018.

13 Cf. the contribution of Kovac on the ‘never again’ commitment as a subject of scientific study. Kovac 2021: 29–35.

DNA of the democratic state system and is also the guiding principle for its foreign policy.

1.1 Auschwitz: Never Again!

The rupture in civilisation caused by National Socialism was unprecedented in history. A mere glance at the Nazi regime's network of concentration camps spanning the whole of Central and Eastern Europe and the industrial extermination of human lives, especially in Auschwitz,¹⁴ reveals to the observer: Many people in post-war Germany – West and East – often pushed aside the guilt. However, there was an acknowledgement of the obligation to bear responsibility to the international community in memory of these atrocities and to establish an appropriate new moral foundation for our own social and government actions. In a nutshell: 'Auschwitz: never again!'

Since then, the commitment to human rights or the prevention and/or ending of persecution, displacement and genocide have moulded the German self-image of the democratic state under the rule of law and the moral imperative of German foreign policy. It is the basis for the historically grown obligation toward Israel as the home of those who escaped the German-initiated Holocaust at the time. Defending the existence of the State of Israel was *raison d'état* for German foreign policy, already during its early stage. Harnisch states that '[only] guilt, atonement and forgiveness as standards and practices of the international community after 1945 enable [the perpetrators] [...] to own up to being perpetrators, "make amends" and in doing so gain readmission to the international community'.¹⁵ Lübke-meier states that history continues to have an effect and warns that 'German foreign policy [...] would do well to continue taking this into account'.¹⁶

1.2 Never Again Alone – Never Again War!

After the abolition of democracy between the two World Wars, the isolation in terms of foreign policy that had already been complete before World War I, of a German nation that had been martially united for only a few decades – a unification that occurred late, in 1871, in Versailles, the heart of Germany's recently defeated arch-rival France – and that, after its founding years and subsequent ascent, contended for supremacy in Europe and overseas against the Western European powers, was translated into the showdown of the 'master race' by the rising Nazi Germany. Nazi Germany also managed to rise because of the political instability of the Weimar Republic – created in the very same place (Treaty of Versailles of 1919).

In the historical analysis of the socio-economic and political transformation processes from 1871 to 1939, the periods of pre-war era, World War I, interwar era and World War II build on each other, even though this does not indicate a fateful inevitability with regard to the question of causality.¹⁷ Accordingly, Berger defines the

14 The map of the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History, for example, shows an overview of the places affected by the National Socialists' terror and destruction. Munich – Berlin 2012. It can be found online in *Vor 75 Jahren: Todesmarsch aus Auschwitz. Hintergrund aktuell*, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung [Federal Agency for Civic Education] 2020.

15 Harnisch 2019: 7.

16 Lübke-meier 2021: 18.

17 See, for example, the discussion on the paper that Isabel Funke wrote as an essay for the University of Mannheim, which nicely summarises the issue of continuity; Funke 2014. Cf. also Phönix 2018.

response to this historical error as the ‘central strategies of German foreign and security policy, in particular the automatic tendency toward multilateralism and the preference for non-military conflict solutions, being directly attributable to the controversial debates on the lessons learned from the National Socialist expansion and extermination policy, and [...] not primarily to a fixed national interest [...]’.¹⁸ This had to and should happen ‘never again’. Particularly the subsequent generations in Germany accordingly set an admonitory, moral self-expectation for German foreign and security policy to be committed to peace, freedom and the self-determination of peoples.

2 Safeguarding the Interests of German Foreign and Security Policy: the ‘Business-Is-Business Commitment’

Within a few years of the end of the war, the considerably destroyed western part of Germany achieved an impressive economic rise – in a country in which more than 75 percent of some cities had been destroyed or, in some cases, more than 90 percent, such as in Düren (99.8 percent) or Jülich (100 percent).¹⁹ In the first years following the war, the supply situation of the population in Germany and in large parts of Europe was initially very precarious.²⁰ Still, the West German economy managed to recover in a few years despite all war destruction, though it was limited in the case of industrial facilities.²¹ The US government rejecting an industrial dismantling of West Germany (Morgenthau Plan) and shifting toward the ‘strategic use’ of reconstruction loans (Marshall Plan) in Europe was an important prerequisite – due to its primarily psychological effect – for the economic rise of West Germany. The Marshall Plan was deliberately used as an ‘antidote’ against Soviet influence in Europe that was designed to expand political power, even though it was not intended as a welfare campaign but as a loan offer for Western Europe in support of the sale of American goods.²² The monetary reform, as well, embedded in a basic economic policy orientation (‘social market economy’), and the beginning economic cooperation in Western Europe contributed to a rapid rise over just a few years – keyword ‘(West) German economic miracle’.²³ The main focus was on the associated expanding export of goods, with the result that West Germany’s economic reputation abroad was increasingly determined by this development.²⁴ As a consequence, international recognition grew. As a ‘success story in the international system of capitalism’, the Bonn Republic also played an important strategic role in terms of ideology – especially for the US, which was indispensable for Western Europe’s security, which was under threat by the Soviet Union. Unlike any other country, West Germany stood in contrast to a communist system characterised by command economy and a Soviet cadre dictatorship as a prime example for the system superiority of capitalism based on free trade and Western-style liberal democracy. As a result, the Western projection of power also had an effect on the Warsaw Pact states – especially with regard to the eastern part of Germany, the GDR.

18 Berger 2002: 79, cited in: Harnisch 2019: 6.

19 Aachener Zeitung online 2019.

20 Cf. Beckmann n.d.

21 Cf. Wolf 2016.

22 Cf. Beckmann n.d.

23 Cf. Kimmel 2005; Grau/Haunhorst/Würz 2014; Wolf 2016.

24 Also noteworthy in this regard are the statements made by economic historian Werner Abelshauser, who points out the prerequisites, general economic post-war development and new – now global – export orientation of West Germany; Losse 2017.

But the Rhenisch Republic also used its new economic significance to underline one of its central national objectives – German reunification.²⁵ For example, the Hallstein Doctrine established a package deal linking the beginning provision of development aid by West Germany in the early 1960s to the non-recognition of the GDR.²⁶ The preservation of the conditions for maintaining economic power and increasing prosperity – such as meeting the increasing energy demand (initially oil, later gas) – increasingly influenced, almost like a primacy,²⁷ the foreign policy activities of post-war West Germany. However, the discussion of the causal links between economic interests and their foreign policy and security implications has long been a taboo among the public in view of the self-image of a value-driven foreign policy. This was still the case two decades after the completion of German unity: In 2010, then Federal President Horst Köhler, finally stated openly²⁸ what had already been the reality of Germany's interests for a long time. But by now, 'German interests are regarded as a legitimate guiding principle for foreign-policy activities'.²⁹

Due to the essential importance of foreign trade relations, the general multilateral orientation of West Germany was also a necessary consequence. Not least, the West German desire for cooperation and integration into Western collective systems in the first decades after the war was not only consistent with the need for defence against the Warsaw Pact troops standing east of the Elbe river. By opening up toward the western, capitalism-oriented states, this approach also served to safeguard the new economic orientation of West Germany. However, it must not be forgotten in this regard that the Western Allies or Western Europeans, with their painful experiences in World War II and the previous development, were only willing to permanently integrate West Germany into their defence policy and, with the help of the US, also keep it under control in terms of security policy due to the military threat posed by the Eastern bloc. West Germany as a defensive buffer with growing economic strength, adjacent to the Warsaw Pact states, should not remain excluded but be controlled through transatlantic integration.³⁰

West Germany became increasingly aware of this new strength. The mythicised German economic miracle in the reconstruction years can be symbolically linked to the beginning fiscal stability of the hard Deutschmark. With regard to the western part of post-war Germany finding its identity, this assumption supports the view that the economic power of West Germany, which created respect and growing influence at the international level, had become a new element of identity for the citizens west of the Elbe. As the economic success of the Bonn Republic led to a rapidly growing reputation abroad, this reputation that was conveyed around the world and experienced by West Germany reflected a new form of international importance in West Germany during the period of the national provisional arrangement owing to the division of Germany. The resulting new self-image of Bonn also offset the need for a national identity to some extent. Regarding the shaping of its foreign policy, the later use of the term 'cheque-book diplomacy'³¹ clearly shows how West Germany generated foreign policy effects beyond Western Europe during the phase of partly limited sovereignty, especially since the 1970s.³²

25 Cf. Meier-Walser/Wolf 2012: 6.

26 Cf. Gray 2005. See also the evaluative assessment by Gülstorff 2017.

27 In view of the German-Iranian relations, cf. Bösch 2019: 56–60, esp. 56.

28 Cf. Armbrüster 2010.

29 Lübkemeier 2021: 19.

30 Kagan 2019: 63 f.

31 Cf. Haftendorn 2012: 17.

32 Cf. Haftendorn 2019: 56–60.

Having risen to one of the leading exporting and economic powers, with financial power radiating out and, at the same time, attracting outside entities, West Germany, albeit being curtailed in its foreign and security policy, gained considerable influence on the international stage. This, in turn, enabled the creation of a new power projection in the context of international relations. This was true not only in view of the gradual and slow economic integration of Western Europe, but also worldwide. This significance led to West Germany and France becoming key states within the Western European community. This development was due to their importance at the security policy level – France as a nuclear power with a seat on the UN Security Council – as well as due to their economic power – West Germany with its increasing economic power. This entente ultimately became the driving force behind the further development of Western Europe, which was increasingly uniting economically and, at some point, also politically.

In addition, West Germany's dedication to the European integration process was not seriously perceived as an expression of a policy driven by hegemonic interest, much less as a serious threat to security. Due its economic advantages, this commitment was rather considered an asset, especially since Germany, as a divided country with limited security relevance due to the consequences of the war, could hardly dominate Western Europe in this respect. In fact, thanks to the resulting appreciation for West Germany, this impetus toward a union of Western Europe aimed at promoting the prosperity of all its members even led to the perception that this European construct was an adequate, albeit supra-nationally enhanced substitute for a new self-image of a nation involved in shaping it. In comparison to overcoming the division of the nation, this ambition of West Germany continued to seem realistic well into the eighties. The fall of the Berlin Wall, however, was considered impossible to achieve within the near future – until those events in the period from late summer 1989 to autumn 1990 that should fundamentally change the framework of international relations.

3 Conflicting Values and Interests – the Issue of Consistency in the Credibility of German Foreign and Security Policy

The 'Peaceful Revolution' in autumn 1989 and the consequences in the wake of German unity, the end of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union fundamentally changed the foreign policy and security system of the distribution of power within Europe. As a result, however, the system of the European Community (or Communities) binding together Western Europe was not abandoned³³ but rather consolidated. It was further developed into the European Union (EU) through the introduction of a shared internal market and shared currency and, from 2004 on, also extended to include Eastern Europe. With Germany's increasing 'integration' after the German unification, it was virtually impossible for it to take a national special path (Sonderweg) that could become a threat to its European neighbours.³⁴ Yet, the already existing importance based on the economic influence of Germany, now united and furnished with full sovereign rights in its foreign and security policy, already began growing further in the first decade of this century – whether intended or not. The reality of the single European market considerably reinforced Germany's special position. At the latest, the increasing significance of a united Germany (as a key state of the EU) grew considerably in the

33 Meier-Walser/Wolf 2012: 7.

34 Cf. Haftendorn 2012: 16.

course of managing the 2008 financial crisis. This growing German power position in matters of foreign policy and security was also evident in the attempt to contain the conflict in Ukraine (Minsk Agreement of 2015) – although it was ultimately unsuccessful. Less than 20 years after achieving German unity, Germany became not just one, but increasingly *the* leading European power, whose position of power in the EU is shared by France at best, though not in terms of economy but in the defence and military sector.

However, this increase in power and the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU (Brexit vote in 2016), a nation that used to balance German and French interests, did and still could increase the risk of rivalry between the two leading member states. Ultimately, this could also lead to a split into two camps, especially if Germany were to use its power position within the EU to assert its economic and financial interests within the European framework at the expense of one or more other EU member states. This conflict of interest is currently being intensified by the fact that the nationalist opposition in France is putting Germany’s position in Europe – and the allegedly resulting economic dependence of France on Berlin – on the political agenda. In doing so, it seeks to put domestic pressure on the pro-European French governments that have been in favour of the Franco-German entente since de Gaulle.

But not only the opposition in France is currently observing German foreign and security policy with suspicion. The media discourse in the US also expounded on Germany’s alleged restraint in foreign and security policy. Specifically, due to lacking reliability in foreign policy regarding Alliance solidarity, the US media questioned Germany’s credibility with regard to the support of Ukraine, which had already been threatened by Russia before the attack.³⁵ Especially when considering the rebalancing of the united Germany in terms of power politics and looking forward to the twenties of the 21st century that have already begun, there is enough reason to ask whether the allegedly existing balance between German interests and values has changed with the increase in power.

However, the current events of the war in Ukraine in particular reveal the absence of this balance and the lack of consistency in the credibility of a value-based German foreign and security policy.

The question of this credibility was the subject of intense discussions especially at the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, but it also generally touches on other issues of German foreign and security policy. For the attentive political observer, this definitely raises questions concerning the credibility claimed with regard to a value-based German foreign and security policy: when heavy military equipment is delivered to an area of tension or a war zone with escalation potential and at the same time civilian crisis management is conducted to strengthen or establish lasting peace, for example in African crisis regions, or when a crisis that has turned into a hot conflict is to be contained or ended again. Furthermore, there is close trade cooperation with states in which corrupt elites and despots rule on the one hand, yet Germany is committed to human rights around the world, making demands on governments to respect the human rights they disregard and condemning political persecution, oppression, displacement and genocide on the other hand. I will examine and put to the test the issue of consistent credibility between the claimed and the actual commitment of German foreign and

³⁵ cf. Theil 2022; see also Ward 2022. After Russian President Putin had recognised the secessionist regions of Ukraine, Federal Chancellor Scholz announced on 22 February 2022 that the approval process of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was stopped, which was welcomed and had previously been requested by (Western) Allies. Entscheidung der Bundesregierung: Genehmigung von Nord Stream 2 gestoppt. Tageschau Online 2022a.

security policy to values in the following by studying the relations with the Middle East and/or Germany's bilateral key relations.

3.1 The Relations with the Middle East – Arms Export to a Crisis Region

First, it should be noted that the responsibility for armaments exports lies with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action and not with the Federal Foreign Office. This raises the fundamental question as to whether the export of armaments is not so much an issue of 'promoting economic development or of export control, but rather of foreign and security policy'.³⁶ According to Georg Mascolo, this 'current state' is already a structural 'design flaw'.³⁷ In the period from 2016 to 2020, Germany, which is committed to safeguarding human rights and international peace around the world, was the fourth largest exporter of large weapon systems after the US, Russia and France.³⁸ As early as 2018, a passage regarding the issue of armaments exports was included in the then coalition agreement of the SPD and the CDU/CSU with the intention of halting deliveries to all states directly involved in the war in Yemen. However, this decision was only implemented for Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen.³⁹ In actual fact, export licences in 2019 were at a record level of about 8 billion euros⁴⁰ and, after a decrease of the annual value in the following year, this value increased to the highest level ever with 9.35 billion euros in 2021⁴¹. Especially to Saudi Arabia, individual licences amounting to more than 30 million euros were granted for the export of German military equipment.⁴² During this time, however, Saudi Arabia was not only a party to the conflict in Yemen but also one of the biggest opponents of Iran in terms of foreign policy and security. Germany expects Iran to ensure the peaceful use of its nuclear energy and has actively worked toward a limitation on use during the negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal (2015) and continues to do so.

This has been and is done knowing of the military potential of the alleged nuclear power Israel, Iran's arch enemy. Israel, which has been supplied with German military equipment since the beginning of the 1950s, at the latest since 1956/57,⁴³ benefitted from the motive of Germany's moral obligation to support Israel in ensuring its existence. From the start, however, this was not the only motive for military cooperation⁴⁴; armaments exports to the Middle East region were and are a lucrative business for Germany. With regard to arms trade in the record year 2021, Mascolo noted that 'in the period of the coalition between the Socialist Democrats and the Green Party from 1998 to 2005, the Greens were also [involved] in this particular German economic miracle [...], to then strongly criticise such business, for example with Saudi Arabia, as an opposition party, and to even file a lawsuit with the Federal Constitutional Court for a stronger involvement of the parliament in armaments exports'.⁴⁵

And does the export of armaments to Israel or to this crisis region constitute the morally justified exception? Not at all, because another exception was made in the case

36 Mascolo 2022.

37 Ibid.

38 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (ed.) 2021.

39 Tagesschau online 2021.

40 Cf. *ibid.*

41 Cf. Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland 2022a.

42 Cf. Statista Research Department 2022.

43 Serr 2015.

44 Cf. *ibid.*

45 Mascolo 2022.

of arming the Kurds in the fight against what is known as the Islamic State in 2014. But, even if – according to Mascolo – ‘not every exception [can] be defined or even solved by law [...]’, it still must be clear that an exception should remain an exception because, originally, ‘[...] exports outside NATO should hardly play a role [and] nothing at all should be delivered to [...] areas of tension [...]’. However, the ‘the German [defence] industry owes the boom of the recent years, above all, [to] [...] its loyal customers in the permanent crisis region of the Middle East,’ said Mascolo, demanding that ‘at least after the involvement of many states there in the war in Yemen [...] [this should have] “finally come to an end”’.⁴⁶ Germany’s years of entanglement in the field of armaments – also in crisis regions – and the Federal Government’s practice in armaments policy, which was in effect at least until 2021 and expanded to record-breaking export figures in the same year, are evident and have given a further and unprecedented economic boost to the German defence industry. The Federal Government generally and deliberately tried – with the aspiration of having a value-based foreign policy – to fight fire (escalation of violence in crisis regions through destruction and confusion) with fire (more weapons).

The Federal Government in office since December 2021 had announced – before the war in Ukraine – that it would no longer grant export licences for military equipment to states if there were proof of their direct involvement in the war in Yemen and also postulated that, as a matter of principle, Germany ‘[needed] more stringent rules [...] for a restrictive armaments export policy’⁴⁷ and therefore pursued a corresponding EU armaments export regulation with the European partners. But even if the new Federal Government were able to go through with this intention and also succeeded in ‘anchoring’ the political principles for the export of weapons of war and other military equipment in a national armaments export control law, it has made it clear that it wanted to permit justified exemptions.⁴⁸

The Federal Government’s decision of 26 February 2022 to deliver weapons to Ukraine, exercising its legitimate right to self-defence in the war against Russia, signifies the creation of a new case of this kind. Nevertheless, this additional ‘exception’ should not completely override the rule of not sending weapons to crisis areas according to Chancellor Scholz. This guideline should still be observed ‘in many instances’.⁴⁹ Due to the violation of international law and the right to self-defence in the war of aggression waged by Russia, this act of delivering weapons is expressly presented as being in line with the Western understanding of values. However, it is also no longer ruled out in general to supply weapons to crisis areas.⁵⁰ As a result, the previously applicable ‘fundamental principle of exception’ was abandoned.

However, this leads to questions that sometimes make a moral justification seem very construed; for example, when discussing which delivery quantities are still appropriate from an ethical perspective (‘100’, ‘up to 250’ or ‘up to 730’ surface-to-air missiles or an even larger quantity) and the order of magnitude starting at which military equipment (combat aircraft etc.) is no longer ethically acceptable.

After the beginning of the war in Ukraine and the Federal Government’s decision to deliver weapons directly to a warring party in Europe, about a two-hour flight away from Berlin, the understandable question arises to what extent the reality of massive armaments exports, against the background of escalation risks, can be reconciled with the claim of having a crisis prevention policy that is based on values and geared toward

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ SPD / Bündnis 90/Die Grünen / FDP 2021: 146.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Welt online 2022.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

peace. This is especially true when the ethically justified line of only sending weapons to crisis areas in exceptions was generally crossed in the case of Ukraine and a paradigm shift has taken place in that regard.

3.2 Relations with China – Executioner and Most Important Trading Partner?

On the one hand, Germany officially addressed the oppression of the people in China⁵¹, the country with the highest execution rate worldwide.⁵² Yet, on the other hand, care was taken to ensure that the economic relations with the high-tech country of China – which has become a global economic power – that are vital for the exporting nation of Germany do not suffer any significant damage. The fact is that China repeatedly was Germany's most important trading partner in 2019. In 2019, exports to China amounted to almost 100 billion euros. This constitutes a threefold increase in the period from 2007 to 2019.⁵³ For Germany or a German Federal Government, the challenge in shaping relations with China so far has been to balance the predominantly economic interests with the values (respect for the rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights) that characterise German foreign policy.

This was especially characteristic for Germany's policy on China under the leadership of Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU).⁵⁴ However, it was already a challenge for the preceding governments under Chancellors Helmut Kohl (CDU) and Gerhard Schröder (SPD) to maintain such a balance in Germany's policy on China.⁵⁵ Huang notes that this 'balancing act is regularly a challenge [...] in dealing with the transatlantic partners' and 'all the more difficult concerning a partner like China, whose values, system and social identity are so different from those in Germany and Europe'.⁵⁶ In this context, Huang sees the tendency – with a view to the years of government under Angela Merkel's leadership – that the 'pendulum between realism and ideology [...], however, has increasingly swung in the direction of an interest-driven policy in recent years', which is motivated by the 'enormous Chinese market'.⁵⁷ Outlining the policy toward China and using it as an example for the entire foreign policy of the Merkel era, Ulrich Reitz states: The Federal Chancellor had measured policy on China primarily according to its value for German trade. Reitz becomes even more frank by pointedly noting that the 'fate of Hongkongers, Tibetans, Uyghurs and Taiwanese [...] [had played] virtually no role in foreign policy practice beyond concerned soapbox speeches'⁵⁸ and therefore the declaimed mantra of human dignity and human rights merely existed as a ritual, but did not actually have any decisive relevance to action.

But will the 2021 change of power in German foreign and security policy result in the claim of putting 'morals first' replacing Merkel's 'money first'?⁵⁹ Shortly before assuming office as foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock had made it clear that 'a value-driven foreign policy [...] must always be an interaction of dialogue and rigour', but that imposing an import ban on goods from the Chinese region of Xinjiang, where

⁵¹ Cf. Zeit online 2020.

⁵² Cf. Amnesty International (ed.) 2021.

⁵³ Cf. Huang 2021: 33; cf. Statistisches Bundesamt (ed.) 2022. 2022.

⁵⁴ Huang 2021: 33.

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 34.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 33.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Reitz 2021.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

people are systematically exploited as slave labourers, was an appropriate means of exerting pressure on the Chinese government. ‘Us Europeans should make much greater use of this lever of the shared internal market,’ said Baerbock.⁶⁰

Consequently, it would be conceivable to ask what Germany’s foreign policy position toward China would be with regard to the human rights debate if China as a global player were to see its own interests affected by it. Would China, as a consequence, then restrict its trade relations with Germany or further increase the obstacles for German companies in China and thereby impede their access to the Chinese market or even lock them out? Would Germany then be able to stand up against China for human rights and maintain its commitment to values in foreign and security policy without having to accept economic consequences? Reitz, too, does not fail to mention in his comment that a change in orientation toward an increasingly value-oriented China policy of the post-Merkel era could possibly have considerable implications for Germany’s prosperity.⁶¹ Would it not be more effective to gain influence on China’s human rights policy especially by intensifying economic relations and then use it to exert political pressure on the regime in Beijing when necessary – keywords: Uyghur Freedom? This means expanding the orientation toward economic interests with the option of using it as a means to an end (‘value-driven foreign policy’) and in doing so morally legitimising Germany’s orientation toward economic interests. In short, the question is: ‘Change through trade’ or change through the expansion of economic ties, change through a mutual bond between partners on equal terms? But does the idea of being on equal terms even apply when taking a realistic look at the positions of power of China and Germany? Would such a bond not more likely lead to dependence? And who is more dependent on whom? And who would, in consequence, be at risk of being more vulnerable in terms of their autonomy and self-determination, including their foreign and security policy?⁶²

Against this backdrop as well as in view of China’s projection of power throughout the world (‘Belt and Road Initiative’) and Germany’s increasing economic entanglement with China, the question arises whether the German orientation toward economic interests in its policy on China can actually be used as a means to enforce its commitment to values. Or could Germany, especially because of this ‘powerlessness’, argue its way out of its ethical responsibility? This point may hold true from a national point of view, but not as a member of influence-generating international systems of alliances and relations. Within this framework, Germany is not relieved of its ethical responsibility to exert influence on China. When considering the development of German-Chinese relations over the past decades, however, it must be noted that Germany’s economic-based orientation of interests so far has taken precedence over a commitment to values in German foreign and security policy, resulting in inconsistent credibility also in this area.

3.3 Relations with the US – ‘Values or Our Security’?

In view of the strategically oriented projection of power by China, which was ‘increasingly challenging us and seeking confrontation’⁶³ and once US President Donald Trump, who was confrontational toward Germany as a trade competitor, was

⁶⁰ Spiegel online 2021.

⁶¹ Cf. Reitz 2021.

⁶² A dependence that, in the case of Germany, has also become apparent with regard to Russia in the issue of energy dependency.

⁶³ Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] (ed.) 2021.

voted out of office⁶⁴, Berlin closed ranks with the new US administration that has been in office since 2021. With regard to the shared understanding of values, the previous Federal Government considered close political coordination with the US under Democratic President Joe Biden essential and suggested, for example, a ‘transatlantic New Deal’ to act as ‘a voice of reason in our joint fight for democracy’.⁶⁵

However, a value-oriented foreign policy characterised by idealism can also lead to disaster according to Friedbert Pflüger, when looking at the US as an example.⁶⁶ In this context, he refers to Karl Kaiser and Karsten Voigt with his remark that ‘exports of democracy to regions characterised by completely different traditions and values [...] are [threatening] to fail’.⁶⁷ The result was that Western states led by the US had failed to improve the situation of the local people, but rather exacerbated it.⁶⁸ For example, Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan have become synonymous with the failure of the West in the Middle East.⁶⁹

In this context, the question also arises to what extent an idealistic attitude can really guide action in foreign and security policy in the specific case when freedom, the self-determination of peoples and human rights are under threat. The freedom-loving people of East Berlin (1953, 1961) or Hungary (1956) had already hoped for a massive military response from the US.⁷⁰ But this response never came, nor did it during the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. The United States’ security policy red line, meaning the point at which immediate military, if necessary nuclear, action would be taken, would likely be crossed, however, if the dividing line between the dominant spheres of influence were seriously disregarded – for instance by Russia or China – and the security of the US and world peace were jeopardised.⁷¹ Incumbent US President Biden also made that unmistakably clear after the war in Ukraine broke out for the contingency that on one of the NATO member states were attacked.⁷² The question of crossing this red line would also arise for the US should the People’s Republic of China attack Taiwan. This scenario could possibly occur if China, due to increased military tensions or even a – neither planned nor intended – military confrontation between NATO and Russia in Europe, in light of the then massive military commitment of the West in that theatre, took advantage of the situation to attack Taiwan.

Both the results of an idealistic, value-based foreign and security policy in the Middle East and the willingness of the West to stay within its own power-politically secured sphere of influence in defending freedom, self-determination and human rights with determination and, if necessary, with all conceivable military consequences, have been noted by powers competing with the West, such as Russia and China. Beijing and Moscow could conclude that the US and its Western allies are only conditionally committed to democracy and the rule of law and that the West’s noble claim must therefore be seen as relative and implies no restrictions for counteracting activities at the political or military level.

This assessment of the West by Russia and China, together with the West’s demand for a value-based orientation of international relations, could not – especially in view of the humiliating images of victims of torture at Abu Ghraib and captivity in

⁶⁴ Cf. Mildner/Schmucker 2018.

⁶⁵ Auswärtiges Amt [Federal Foreign Office] (ed.) 2021.

⁶⁶ Cf. Pflüger 2021.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷¹ Cf. Biden 2022. Cf. also Mayer 2022.

⁷² Cf. *ibid.* Cf. also Biden 2022.

Guantanamo – be perceived as a convincing projection of power nor as morally justified or as therefore credible by Russia, China or others.

The security guarantees of NATO and the US for Europe are of vital importance for Germany. The question is to what extent Germany would be prepared to restrict its trade relations with China, which it considers essential, and accept the economic disadvantages in favour of the supposedly shared understanding of values and security with the US or make them dependent on it. Could the US government's call to the EU and Germany for an increased commitment to values in foreign policy not also be motivated by economic policy and, from this perspective, be nothing more than a pretext for preventing the EU and Germany from intensifying economic relations with its rival China? Is the real motivation of the US not rather the concern that it will not lose further ground in the global economic competition and competition between systems with China? Would a further expansion of (strategic) economic cooperation toward a strategic partnership between Germany and China then have security political implications for German-American relations? Would Germany ultimately be forced to comply with Washington's request because of its security dependence on the United States in order not to jeopardise or weaken the United States' security guarantees for Europe and Germany? Would Berlin not be bound to do so, at least as long as the EU alone is only partly prepared to defend itself against Russia, Iran and China at the military level? If this were the case, Germany would have to set aside its economic interests in favour of its existential security interests. This happened in the case of the acute Russian threat and the then imminent attack on Ukraine, when the Federal Government suspended its approval of Nord Stream 2. This means that economic interests are subordinated to security interests.

Therefore, a pertinent analysis of German-American relations also reveals an inconsistency in credibility: between the claim of a value-oriented – and militarily cautious – foreign and security policy on the one hand and German security interests, which must be ensured by military means and which can currently only be guaranteed by NATO – led by the militarily dominant US openly projecting power – on the other hand. Germany, as a trade competitor of the United States, will also subordinate its own economic interests in case of an acute threat.

3.4 Relations with France – Value-Based Partnership of Equals or Agent of French Interests?

When looking at the development of Franco-German relations, some might appreciate the uniqueness of the history of reconciliation between these two large neighbouring European countries. Over a period of less than three generations, this history of reconciliation evolved from wars in Europe and a feud spanning generations that divided the continent to an alliance, the Entente, characterised by peace and friendship that unifies Europe. Considering the shared experiences in Versailles (1871 and 1919), the 'blood pump' of Verdun (1916) in World War I and the German occupation period in France (1940–44), the solemn act of reconciliation between then Federal Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, and French President Charles de Gaulle at the symbolic Reims Cathedral, the traditional location for the coronation of the kings of France, in 1963 was of almost spiritual character and the beginning of this historically important development for peace in Europe.

Undoubtedly, this 'political narrative', this story of reconciliation and friendship and its images in the minds of the people of both nations, constitute a solid base of values. At the same time, it must not be denied that the motivation for cooperation between the two states was already based on political calculation at that time: For one,

France was interested in the economic power of its neighbour east of the River Rhine – e.g. via the European Coal and Steel Community.⁷³ In addition, France saw Germany as a bulwark or a territorial buffer against the Soviet Union’s nuclear power threatening Western Europe. On the other hand, France as an occupying force was indispensable as a partner for West Germany’s return to the international community and the restoration of full state sovereignty via the route of (Western) European unification.⁷⁴ However, it is precisely the mutual calculation that was and still is one of the hallmarks of the relationship between France and the Federal Republic of Germany. Due to its cooperative and integrative effect, this calculation generated a peace dividend that would benefit all of Western and, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Eastern Europe to this day. The current French President Emanuel Macron is also aware of the consistent value of this Franco-German Entente for the European Union. Germany’s major contribution to the financing of the European budget⁷⁵ resulting from Germany’s economic strength not least also guarantees the financial stability of France, which is also of vital importance with regard to domestic policy.

Although the French European policy is an important element, especially of France’s domestic policy, it is not the only perspective of French interests which, in comparison to Germany – not least for historical reasons – have a decidedly geopolitical orientation.

Paris is paying special attention to Africa. The French influence in West Africa continues following the end of the colonial era both in terms of trade and financial policy (role of the West African currency *Franc-CFA* or *Eco*) and foreign policy – even considering the aggressive projection of power in the region by Russia and China.⁷⁶ After the African states gained independence, the influence of France had been maintained through cooperation with the now new domestic power elites of West Africa. To this day, this represents a continuity of French power in this region of Africa.⁷⁷ The French commitment in West Africa in general, and more recently especially with regard to Mali, as well as the French expectation of assistance (2015) in accordance with Article 42(7) of the EU Treaty, especially with regard to Germany, illustrate the French self-image with respect to security policy (anti-terror mission). They also touch on the question of the French safeguarding of interests in Africa (to secure uranium deposits in northern Mali and uranium mines in Niger for the resource trade with China), which is motivated by economic policy and have a geopolitical orientation.⁷⁸ Even China’s and Russia’s increasing power projections in Africa and a French withdrawal from Mali will not in any way eliminate the French claim (to power) in terms of economic and security policy in the region, since the commitment in this part of the world is generally in line with France’s (geopolitical) self-image. This does not mean that Paris will neglect to emphasise the partnership-based (re-)orientation of the French Africa policy. However, this was already happening before Macron’s presidency.⁷⁹

At first glance, a geopolitical self-image like that of France is not reflected in German Africa policy, even though Germany did already generate political influence before the German reunification due to its economic power. In principle, this creates the danger that German efforts at state level could also support political despots and corrupt

⁷³ Cf. Abelshauser 2002; Patel 2005.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Cf. Urmersbach 2022; Handelsblatt online 2021; cf. Kafsack 2021.

⁷⁶ Cf. Deutsche Welle online 2020b; cf. also Deutsche Welle online 2020a.

⁷⁷ Cf. *ibid.* and Deutsche Welle online 2020b.

⁷⁸ Cf. Gebauer/Hengst 2013; cf. Spiegel online 2007; cf. also Branco 2016.

⁷⁹ Cf. Thorel 2013; cf. also Lacher 2021.

power elites. With regard to the continued existence of dictatorships, it could be argued that, for the purpose of generating influence, the Federal Government must also play nice with such rulers to be in a position to help the suffering local population in the first place. But this approach could directly lead Germany's value-based foreign policy into a moral dilemma. Such a dilemma may also arise indirectly in the event of indirect German support of French Africa policy, if it primarily serves the power projection of France as an actor in the region cooperating with illegitimate regimes. In this way, Germany would politically accept the relativisation of its own moral claims in order not to jeopardise, in particular, the joint shaping of policy within the EU with its partner France. For Germany's aim is not to weaken the position of its partner France in Europe, also in order to not unnecessarily boost the voices critical of Europe and Germany in French domestic policy.

Not only direct but also indirect support of despots or corrupt power elites is therefore – with regard to the claim to values of German foreign and security policy – ethically dubious. This could also leave the impression when considering the Franco-German relations that credibility is also inconsistent regarding the question of this claim.

3.5 Relations with Türkiye – Turkish Despot Protecting the Fortress of Europe?

France and Germany are cooperating in the management of the refugee crisis. The pressure to resolve the migration crisis increased the willingness of the EU and Germany to cooperate with Türkiye. Without Ankara's willingness to negotiate and to sign a treaty, increasing numbers of refugees could have put considerable migration pressure on the EU. Such a development could have caused domestic concern in Germany that it could have severely impacted the cohesion of German society. The internal stability of Germany and the EU would probably have been challenged more than before.

And even though Türkiye is an important country for the EU and NATO in terms of military strategy, there are nonetheless considerable doubts whether the cooperation with an increasingly autocratic Turkish government that is challenging the rule of law and is dismantling or restructuring democratic conditions and institutions is compatible with the claimed values of German foreign and security policy or with the relevant EU standards.

Moreover, doubts about the fulfilment of the German and European value norms are growing, especially when looking at the great suffering of refugees the periphery of a Europe – led by Germany – that supposedly sees itself as the defender and bastion of humanity in the world. According to Lübke-meier, 'the problem of values and interests [of Europe] becomes even more important when migration control [also] requires cooperation with unscrupulous powers in transit and origin regions'.⁸⁰ This gives the impression, when considering the German-Turkish relations, that interest-based foreign and security policy dominates here, especially with regard to internal stability and military strategic considerations.

In view of the cooperation with the autocratic regime in Ankara that is challenging human rights and the rule of law in order to limit migration, while accepting the suffering of refugees, especially women and children on the various refugee routes and in the relevant camps, the question arises to what extent the commitment of German foreign and security policy to values propagated by Germany must be considered credible and, in this case as well, inconsistent.

⁸⁰ Lübke-meier 2021: 20.

3.6 Relations with Russia – Protection Guaranteed by a Community of Values or Security in Europe through Cooperation with a Major Energy Supplier?

The question of how to shape relations with Russia has always posed substantial challenges for German foreign and security policy. The interaction between these challenges has far-reaching consequences. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022 is another chapter in the history of this relationship, which is marked by strain, suffering, death and destruction, but also by mutual respect and an appreciation of each other's culture. Generally, and especially now, German-Russian relations are one of the most challenging bilateral relationships in Germany's foreign and security policy.

Since war broke out in Ukraine in February 2022, Germany's defence and security interests, which are safeguarded by the NATO Alliance, have become a focal point of interest. Nonetheless, in the face of this threat situation, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is aware that lasting peace cannot really be achieved in all of Europe in opposition to Russia⁸¹ and that relations in the energy sector are essential for both sides, at least for the time being. But first and foremost, Germany depends on the energy supplies provided by Russia.

Until the war broke out in February, Germany had tried to ensure a balance between the different interests of German foreign and security policy, especially under the previous government led by Chancellor Merkel, which the SPD, who is part of the current government, supported. This was a balancing act: On the one hand, there were general efforts to achieve a common understanding of security in Europe that includes Russia and – in the spirit of the principle of “change through trade” – cultivating economic relations, especially with a view to securing Germany's energy supply with Russian gas (Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2), oil and coal.⁸² On the other hand, the protective alliance that is NATO with the United States as its key military element is guaranteeing Europe's security by taking security policy measures to secure the eastern flank. For years, walking this tightrope seemed feasible. While doing this, it was essential not to fall into the trap of political naiveté. That means neither being ignorant of the geopolitical significance of Europe for Washington and the substantial economic self-interest of the United States (export of climate-damaging American liquefied natural gas (LNG), mainly shale gas),⁸³ nor being naive while dealing with a Russian despot in Moscow.

The autocrat currently ruling in the Kremlin has repeatedly violated international laws for years, suppressed all democratic opposition in the country and deported its members to labour camps, and is also suspected of having orchestrated killings abroad. This makes it obvious that the current Russian president and his policies are at odds with the principles of the constitutional democracies of the West and their values and self-image. To top it all off, the Russian president has been funding this antagonistic orientation with the revenues from gas supplied via Nord Stream 1, among other things, which Russia has been receiving from precisely those Western democracies it is challenging, especially from Germany. While the previous German government under the leadership of Angela Merkel, in the spirit of the aforementioned balancing of interests, had even succeeded in making the incumbent US president accept the planned

⁸¹ Cf. Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1350 A.

⁸² Cf. Shagina/Westphal 2021; also cf. Gill-Piatek 2021.

⁸³ Cf. Tagesschau online 2021b; also cf. esp. Gheorghiu 2020.

follow-up project Nord Stream 2,⁸⁴ Merkel's successor Scholz stopped the Nord Stream 2 project on 22 February 2022 after president Vladimir Putin had recognised the secessionist regions of Luhansk and Donetsk in the east of Ukraine.⁸⁵ On the same day, the German Minister of Economics and Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck found even more direct words when he criticised the gas pipeline, stating that it should not have been built in the first place, because energy policy was not only part of economic policy but also always to be 'assessed in terms of security policy and geopolitics'.⁸⁶ With the beginning of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the balance of German-Russian relations shifted to the detriment of the priority of economic interests. Even so, the complete abandonment of this approach has not yet been completed and, at least initially, pledges of German arms deliveries were rather hesitant, to the displeasure of Germany's ally Poland.⁸⁷ On 27 February, the German Chancellor, a member of the Social Democratic Party and having been in office for less than 100 days, proclaimed in a special session of the German Bundestag⁸⁸ that a watershed era⁸⁹ had begun in the history of Europe as the Putin regime's breach of international law and assault on Ukraine had shattered the European security architecture that had been in place since the Helsinki Final Act (1975).⁹⁰ Scholz announced the delivery of German weapons to the war and crisis area – the commitment to value-driven politics precludes this, at least in principle (as in the Yemen conflict) – and the fulfillment or overfulfilment of the assurance given to NATO to devote at least two percent of GDP to defence spending. Furthermore, he stated that he intended to enable the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) to become a defence-ready, 'powerful, cutting-edge, progressive' military force, creating a 'Bundeswehr that can be relied upon to protect us'⁹¹ and thus intended to provide appropriate funding (100 billion euros as a one-off extra budget).⁹² These measures reflect a change of course in German foreign and security policy that equals a paradigm shift. In an interview on the following day, the Federal Minister of Finance Christian Lindner stated that the goal was to provide Germany with one of the 'most capable and powerful armed forces in Europe'.⁹³ On 1 March 2022, Noah Barkin commented on this in the American political magazine *The Atlantic*, writing 'Europe's Sleeping Giant Awakens'.⁹⁴ The end of German restraint in defence policy, the end of the Merkel era – as Gabor Steingart described this 'U-turn' – had thus been brought about for good.⁹⁵

The aspiration of German foreign and security policy seems clear with regard to the attitude of the Federal Government toward the Russian assault on Ukraine, Russia's breach of international law and failure to recognise the democratically elected Zelenskyy government: In his speech in the German Bundestag on 27 February, Chancellor Scholz referred to peace, freedom and democracy, to 'values we share with

⁸⁴ Cf. Emendörfer 2021; Shagina/Westphal 2021; cf. Gill-Piatek 2021.

⁸⁵ Cf. Tageschau online 2022a.

⁸⁶ Cf. Tageschau online 2022b.

⁸⁷ Cf. N-TV online 2022a. And cf. regarding the delivery of 1000 grenade launchers, 500 surface-to-air missiles (Stinger): N-TV online 2022a.

⁸⁸ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1350 A-1355 A; cf. also the exact wording of Scholz's historic speech: Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland online 2022b.

⁸⁹ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1350 A.

⁹⁰ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1350 A and *ibid.*: 1350 C.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 1352 D.

⁹² *Ibid.*: 1353 A.

⁹³ Rheinische Post online 2022.

⁹⁴ Barkin 2022.

⁹⁵ Steingart 2022.

them [the people in Ukraine]’.⁹⁶ In the same Bundestag session, Federal Minister Lindner voiced similar views as Chancellor Scholz, referring to defence spending prompted by the war as an ‘investment in our freedom’.⁹⁷

With Germany facing an acute threat, the primary motivation of German foreign and security policy in the context of the described balance of interests is to safeguard the security interests guaranteed by the NATO Alliance. Its central element is collective defence through the mutual promise of assistance given by all member states that have the same understanding of a rules-based and value-based order as Germany. This means that, in the event of an acute military threat posed by Russia, it is certain that the immediate security interests – the collective defence of the NATO countries resting on the military strength of the United States – will undoubtedly take precedence over the indirect security interests of Germany, which involve cooperation with Russia based on presumably reliable dialogue, and Germany’s economic interests in relation to Russia. The current German government, prompted by precisely such an acute military threat as a result of the war in Ukraine, expressed this clearly during the special session of the Bundestag on 27 February 2022. Accordingly, Chancellor Scholz emphasised that the step toward an increase in defence spending would be taken not solely to keep promises made to Germany’s partners in the Alliance, but also ‘for our own security [...], knowing that the Bundeswehr alone does not have the means to contain all future threats’.⁹⁸

However, in times when there was no acute threat from Russia, but Russia instead signalled its willingness to cooperate peacefully, Germany had increased its efforts to deepen the German-Russian dialogue and communication. This behaviour, however, was met with great mistrust on the part of the states in the immediate and extended neighbourhood due to the painful history.⁹⁹ Their fear is that a German-Russian agreement may be reached that compromises, for example, Poland’s or Ukraine’s security while amplifying the power projection of Russia or – as has also happened in the past – of Germany.¹⁰⁰ Therefore concerns may easily develop that, in times of peace and understanding, Germany may attach greater importance to deepening German-Russian relations and bolstering economic interests than to the security interests of the states in close proximity to Russia, such as Poland, the Baltic states and Ukraine.

In view of Germany’s historical responsibility – especially in relation to Poland and Ukraine and the acute threat they face from Putin’s inhuman and oppressive regime – the credibility of Germany’s commitment to values in its foreign and security policy couldn’t be called fully consistent until the conflict in Ukraine escalated in 2022. On the one hand, it is logical that good and active economic relations with Russia generally increase the willingness to engage in peaceful cooperation and thus increase security in the region, even though this cannot be guaranteed, as can be seen from the war in Ukraine. On the other hand, ever increasing economic links also lead to (greater) political dependence, especially in terms of energy security, and thus to greater vulnerability when it comes to an independent foreign and security policy. This could substantially impact the security interests of the states located east of Germany and west of Russia. Germany did go as far as to seek to start up Nord Stream 2 to have its energy needs met by Russia, even in view of the risk of a Russian energy policy that excludes

⁹⁶ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1350 A.

⁹⁷ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1363 C.

⁹⁸ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1353 B.

⁹⁹ Take Poland as an example: the national’s painful experience with Russia and Germany also includes the ‘Partitions of Poland’ (1772, 1793 and 1795), the consequences of the Hitler-Stalin Pact (1939), the Katyn massacre (1940), the Warsaw ghetto (1943) and the oppression in Poland by the Soviets in the years 1956 and 1980/1981.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Süddeutsche Zeitung online 2021.

Ukraine from the Russian supply system. And this was despite the fact that Russia systematically pushed ahead with its destabilisation measures after parts of Ukraine's territory split off in breach of international law – ultimately regardless of the Minsk Agreement of 2015 – and that the funding for Russia's military build-up was enabled by the revenues of energy supplied to Germany.¹⁰¹ Finally, as Robert Habeck observed¹⁰², Germany's dependence on Russian energy supply revealed the country's vulnerability in terms of economic and security policy over the course of the war in Ukraine.

It is clear that, in the event of an acute threat coming from Russia, priorities will change and Germany will prioritise collective defence of the Alliance and an intensification of cooperation with those member states east of Germany that are under threat or feel threatened by Russia. In a case like this, even the German Minister for Climate Action, Mr Habeck, who is not responsible for the development of the government policy of previous years, was willing to change tack in the face of the imminent energy scarcity caused by the threat of war. He has supported the import of climate-damaging LNG, the majority of which is to be provided by the USA, in addition to the use of wind power and hydrogen through the construction of appropriate terminals¹⁰³, and even intensifying economic relations with Qatar, a regime that has repeatedly been suspected of human rights violations.¹⁰⁴

Germany, too, is without a doubt standing by the pledge made to NATO and the EU, referred to as communities of shared values, in the face of an acute threat which is a threat to the security of the eastern NATO member states in particular. This has the effect of bolstering cohesion in this group-dynamic. However, while Russia does not pose an acute threat, Germany's interest in achieving an understanding with Russia becomes more important and Germany's interest in the security needs of the eastern EU and NATO member states decreases. In that case, however, the unifying European community of values will lose the credibility that builds confidence among Eastern Europeans. The war in Ukraine has highlighted this change of Germany's priorities as a member of the community of values and the resulting inconsistency in the credibility of the commitment to values in Germany's foreign and security policy.

4 Conclusions

Eight framework guidelines of German foreign and security policy can be identified:

1. Continued Alliance commitment and loyalty toward NATO as a guarantor of security with the US as the key partner in terms of military strategy (transatlantic relationship)
2. Promote and further develop close cooperation among EU members, taking on a leadership role together with France in order to maintain peace and stability in matters of security policy within and beyond the EU, especially in neighbouring regions and regions relevant to Germany's interests
3. Be willing to open a reliable dialogue and peaceful cooperation with Russia on the basis of international law to establish lasting peace and lasting stability in matters of security policy
4. Support Israel's right to exist

¹⁰¹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰² Cf. Tagesschau online 2022b.

¹⁰³ Cf. Hochstätter 2022; Süddeutsche Zeitung online 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mayerhofer 2022.

5. Safeguard the international order (of peace) while respecting human rights (protection of minorities, equal opportunities for women, protection of children etc.)
6. Maintaining free access to locations and partners of markets around the world (Germany as an exporting nation)
7. Energy and health security
8. Climate protection and worldwide fair participation in natural resources

How can these framework guidelines be kept consistent in view of Germany's aspiration to a value-based foreign and security policy – that is, maintaining credibility and being perceived among international partners as predictable and reliable – and a responsible policy be pursued in the spirit of the aforementioned¹⁰⁵ political pragmatist Helmut Schmidt?

In regard to political decisions pertaining to these framework guidelines, it can be assumed that the current Chancellor Olaf Scholz views them as generally already value-driven as a result of the 'weighing of German interests in the spirit of a German foreign and security policy that is guided by ethics of responsibility'¹⁰⁶ in the spirit of Schmidt. The current Chancellor would likely reject a dogmatic foreign policy that is guided by what Max Weber considered the ethics of conviction and runs counter to the balance of interests or could be expected to do so into the foreseeable future.

However, this balance is put to the test precisely in the context of German-Russian relations. It can be assumed that Scholz is well aware of the possible implications of his political actions regarding the war in Ukraine, since he rejected implementing a no-fly zone over Ukraine enforced by NATO and the use of NATO combat aircraft.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, he was very cautious with regard to supplying larger weapons for a while. While it would be helpful for Ukraine to be able to exercise its reasonable right (under international law) to self-defence more effectively in military terms, the consequences of more aggressive support or direct German involvement in the war would no longer be foreseeable. This would pose the risk of a much greater disaster – the use of tactical nuclear weapons or, ultimately, the beginning of a third world war including nuclear warfare. The Ukrainian ambassador called Germany's decision not to provide combat aircraft 'cowardly'.¹⁰⁸ But, in principle, President Putin's view is that the question of crossing the line between indirect and direct participation in the war already comes up when larger weapons of strategic importance are permanently and systematically supplied to a warring party. This could lead to the *casus belli*, even if arms supplied to a country under attack defending itself are legitimised under international law. But in the case of long-term provision of large arms in large numbers and of outstanding strategic quality, the risk that Russia will perceive this as bellicist – even taking into account Russia's efforts to instigate fear to intimidate the West – cannot be completely ruled out. International law or not. In regard to what is referred to as ethics of responsibility or utilitarianism, which amounts to the same, philosopher Robert Spaemann also brought up the fundamental issue of this approach, which is that it fails (at the latest) 'in view of the complexity and impenetrability of the long-term

105 Refer to the prologue of this text, p. 1 f.

106 Cf. Rupps 2008.

107 Cf. Krüger 2022; Spiegel online 2022a.

108 Spiegel online 2022b.

consequences of our actions’.¹⁰⁹ This should not be completely ignored in relation to the military support provided to Ukraine either.

At first glance, it seems that the decision of the German government to supply (more and more) weapons – also indirectly via a multilateral exchange – corresponds to the principle of ‘ethics of conviction’ while its scope makes it acceptable in terms of ‘ethics of responsibility’. Ultimately, however, because the attacker’s perceptions and actions are unpredictable, this approach is not convincing, given that its consequences cannot be estimated. This also applies when one follows the argument that the aggressor uses its image as an unpredictable actor, based on its military tactics, as a psychological instrument in the context of hybrid warfare, and that one’s own actions should generally not hinge on this.

It is therefore understandable that Vice Chancellor Habeck said that while it was ‘right’ to supply weapons for self-defence, nobody, including him, knew whether it was good to supply weapons. He was also well aware, he said, of the unpredictability of the consequences of this decision when he wondered who could say how this war would develop and who could say ‘whether further decisions will be made as a result of this decision and whether we will, at some point, be providing all kinds of weapons for a persistent long war in Europe?’¹¹⁰ In regard to a fundamental assessment of the utilitarian argument, Spaemann advises caution: ‘We are always in the dark when it comes to the consequences in their entirety’.¹¹¹

According to Spaemann, a purely pacifist argument could be answered by pointing out that a purely pacifist course of action ‘is only sufficient to weaken one’s own position just enough to provoke a potential adversary’, to which a pacifist might reply that this would then be ‘not the pacifist’s fault; when there is killing, the pacifist would like to, at least, not be involved in it.’¹¹² However, even then a general position of ‘not being involved or ‘inaction’ does not relieve the pacifist from the guilt they believe they are escaping.¹¹³ Applied to the case of military support for Ukraine in the war against Russia, an argument that no weapons should be supplied at all, not even for self-defence purposes, could then be understandable, since supplying weapons would generally not be ethically justifiable. Both of Spaemann’s arguments could be answered with a Hegel quote: ‘both the principle of disregarding the consequences of the actions and the principle of judging the actions by their consequences and making these the yardstick of what is just and good [...] are equally abstract reasoning’.¹¹⁴

This means that political decision-makers, who are responsible for either supplying military aid – arms deliveries be they in small or large quantities or lesser or greater quality – or for the failure to provide any military assistance, cannot escape the fact that they might have burdened themselves with guilt. Limiting arms deliveries appears to make any potential guilt more tolerable in this case – compared to deliveries of a larger quantity or greater quality, such as combat aircraft – but it will not resolve it fully. The consequences cannot be fully predicted, neither consequences in the immediate sense, since supplying even a very limited number of weapons involves the risk of killings, nor the indirect consequences. Vice Chancellor Habeck is also aware that even though he considers the decision to provide military support to the agreed extent the right decision, we will still ‘become guilty’ and not ‘come out of this situation with clean hands’.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Spaemann 1982 :67.

¹¹⁰ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1369 A.

¹¹¹ Spaemann 1982: 68.

¹¹² Ibid.: 64.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Deutscher Bundestag [German Bundestag] (ed.) 2022: 1369 A.

Generally, however, it should be absolutely clear that an ethical orientation guiding the German government's interest-driven foreign and security policy will cross the line of credibility if the risk is knowingly accepted that German technology facilitates a military attack or German economic policy finances genocide or if the state cooperates with regimes that (permanently or systematically) commit human rights violations, oppress parts of their population (ethnic or religious or otherwise) and wage a war of extermination. This also applies to any economic cooperation between Germany and others – if it were to knowingly accept that the corresponding economic support would hold despots and their entourages in power that commit mass murder, exterminate entire population groups and systematically abuse women and children or openly seek to do so. These are the lines, effectively in the spirit of 'ethics of conviction', that a value-based German foreign and security policy must never cross. In this context, of course, the question arises as to the responsibility that results from inaction or failure to act – and any additional contexts to which this mindset of non-negotiability pertains should be identified, reflected upon and defined more precisely.

However, as long as German foreign and security policy does not cross such lines and can predict the consequences of its actions as far as is humanly possible, there is no contradiction between pursuing economic interests and the aspiration of a value-driven foreign and security policy, especially since pursuing economic interests is precisely what promotes understanding and trust between states and can benefit the development of bilateral relations. This means that any German government in office can and should also define its own material or regional priorities of interest within this framework in accordance with its political agenda and in doing so shape German foreign and security policy.

With regard to developing the conceptual approach of German foreign and security policy in the current decade, it will be important to review the various bilateral relations and differentiate more between them – based on joint decision-making or coordination within the EU. This means clarifying whether the current instances of intergovernmental cooperation stand up to the self-imposed, normative, ethical aspiration of differentiation between interests and values. And, if it turns out that this is not the case and if change is not possible now or in the foreseeable future, it means deciding whether the specific intergovernmental cooperation under review can continue in its current form. In the event the established ethical boundary prescribed normatively by the German Basic Law has been crossed without a doubt (e.g. evidence of genocide, systematic persecution of parts of the civilian population), intergovernmental cooperation should be suspended at least temporarily, if not for an indefinite period of time. This does not mean that all dialogue via third parties – mediating states, organisations or individuals, i.e. informal communication via unofficial channels – should also be brought to a complete standstill or eliminated. But it means that the boundaries of intergovernmental cooperation, in relation to the bilateral relations in question (e.g. also in a multilateral context such as the EU), would be aligned more closely with the norms and be implemented and represented more consistently than before toward cooperating partners. Unless misused as a means to an end, this generally more specific design of foreign and security policy would also counter the proposed end of the 'rules-based, value-driven world order'¹¹⁶ that Herfried Münkler formulated just after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. A foreign and security policy that makes such value judgements and weighs decisions accordingly, and also has the capability to change perspective, does not contradict the ethical principles of the Western community of values, but rather supports them. It can, after all, be assumed that the reasoning of weighing between different options is not inherent to governments of Western democracies or those with the same order of values

¹¹⁶ Deutschlandfunk online 2022.

alone, even though this reasoning cannot be posited as absolute. Although this assumption does not provide any guarantee for constructive dialog and corresponding willingness to cooperate – especially if the weighing is ignored, fundamentally rejected or just feigned – there is a high probability that this approach is feasible due to its mutual benefit.

Every German government must observe the principles that must form, as it were, the red lines of a value-based German foreign and security policy. They are non-negotiable and cannot be sacrificed for benefit of a ‘greater purpose’, not even for climate protection, protection against terrorism, the preservation of national identity etc. A German government must therefore not succumb to the temptation to justify ethically unacceptable acts of foreign and security policy by referring to a ‘greater purpose’. Accordingly, Spaemann makes it clear that in principle ‘there are no unconditional obligations to act that apply without regard to the circumstances, but there are unconditional obligations to refrain from acting’.¹¹⁷ In this context, he states that the obligation to act ‘is always subject to weighing, in which the idea of a lesser evil has the legitimate place that it cannot have when it comes to the obligation to refrain from acting’, and concludes that the obligation to act ‘is not of the same unconditional nature as the obligation to refrain from acting’.¹¹⁸ Transparency of government action – except in strictly confidential (security) matters – and monitoring, evaluation and parliamentary oversight of government action, as well the investigative eye of the media must therefore be ensured in order to verify adherence to this highest precept.

According to Spaemann’s student Meier, a consistent process of analysis should therefore be used to also clarify which phenomena and fields of policy can be ‘legitimately approached with an interest-based and utilitarian outlook, or (even) have to be implemented with a means-to-an-end policy geared toward utility’.¹¹⁹ However, according to Meier, it has to be taken into account that a foreign and security policy that is committed to values, assuming there are ‘unconditional obligations to refrain from acting’, must be geared towards ethical norms as a matter of principle, ‘which must no longer be cancelled out by any “greater purpose”’.¹²⁰ This means that a value-based foreign and security policy does not conflict with its own normative aspiration until the unnegotiable red lines, which need to be defined, are crossed. This is to be understood in the sense of Spaemann’s criticism of Weber’s view, who himself did not consider what he referred to as ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility as ‘absolute opposites but [as] complements that need to come together to constitute a real human’.¹²¹

The description of this fundamental approach, intended to show the options and limits of a value-based approach and thus point toward ways to ensure consistency in a value-based German foreign and security policy by looking at it from the point of view of political ethics, shall be the cornerstone of this text. However, it is also meant to serve as an impulse for a point of view that would have to be further elaborated. This could be done by focusing on certain individual values and interests with a view to examining the reality of the normative ethical aspiration, also taking into account the individual facets of the spectrum of values and interests to assess the stringency of a value-based foreign and security policy.

¹¹⁷ Spaemann 1999.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Meier 2022; cf. Meier 2014: 53–87; cf. also Meier 2012: 7–20; cf. Meier 2020: 173–176.

¹²⁰ Meier 2022.

¹²¹ Weber 1993: 66.; Weber 1919.

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