

**Tabea H. Wanninger**  
**Stetson University**

## **The 'German Question' Revisited: Change and Continuity in West Germany's Foreign Policy from the *Hallstein Doctrine* to *Ostpolitik***

### **Introduction**

Within the time span of twenty four hours, the Second World War ended; General Alfred Jodl surrendered on May 7th to the Western powers whereas his Eastern counterpart Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel surrendered to the Soviet Union on May 8th. Under the Potsdam Accord Section II(A) 1 of the so-called *Berlin Declaration* German sovereignty was replaced by the "supreme authority" of the victorious war powers.<sup>1</sup> Within four months, the German population went from a sovereign *Volk* to total occupation, a state that would be present for many more years to come.

My paper argues that over the next decades the 'German Question' was heavily influenced by domestic changes which in turn impacted the international context. Moreover, it seeks to highlight the international and domestic constraints on both sovereignty and reunification during that period. The policies pursued under the *Hallstein Doctrine* and *Ostpolitik* - cornerstones of Bonn's foreign policy - are usually described as being diametrically opposed. Adenauer's

---

<sup>1</sup> Library, Yale Law. *The Avalon Project: A Decade of American Foreign Policy 1941-1914 – Potsdam Conference*. (Accessed October 10, 2014), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/decade17.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp). See also Bierling, Stephan. *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Normen, Akteure, Entscheidungen* (2. Ed.). (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005), 69-71.

uncompromising West-orientation stands in stark contrast to Brandt's direct acknowledgement of the factual existence of two states on German soil. However, this paper suggests that such a 'black and white' approach should be re-thought. Both policies must be seen in the context of the then prevailing international environment. Simultaneously, the domestic situation changed drastically from Adenauer to Brandt - from a docile, war-torn population to a 'restless' and economically emboldened German people. Therefore, it appears that there are more commonalities between these two pillars of German foreign policy than is usually assumed. The *means* to achieve their goals were diametrically opposed, but the *fundamentals* of their policy broadly followed a common thread, a unique approach not commonly present in the historiography.

From 1945 onwards, the 'German Question' again dominated the international discourse. It is broadly defined as the centuries-old discussion of the role and involvement that Germany has and should play in international terms. The historiography has produced two overarching debates. Firstly, it centres on the importance domestic issues play in conceptualizing the 'German Question'. The majority of historians argue that it should primarily or solely be discussed within the international context. Gregor Schöllgen,<sup>2</sup> David Calleo,<sup>3</sup> and Hans-Peter Schwarz<sup>4</sup> - *the* authority on Konrad Adenauer - are notable proponents of this interpretation. A minority group, especially Revisionists, attempt to reconfigure the debate by emphasizing the impact of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Schöllgen, Gregor. *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*. (München: C.H. Beck, 2013), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Calleo, David. "Germany and the Balance of Power" in W. F. Hanrieder *West German Foreign Policy: 1949-1979*. pp. 1-14, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1980), 6-8.

<sup>4</sup> Schwarz, Hans-Peter. *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution and Reconstruction (Volume II – The Statesman: 1952-1967)*. Trans. G. Penny, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 807.

domestic arena within the geopolitical framework, a notion supported by Arne Hoffmann<sup>5</sup> and Walther Hubatsch et al.,<sup>6</sup> to name a few.

The second debate focuses on the Federal Republic of Germany's two most important policy issues: reunification and sovereignty. Here, the first group of historians maintains that the *Grundlagenvertrag* (Basic Treaty) of 1955 granted de-facto independence and sovereignty. As the price to pay Chancellor Adenauer had to fully integrate the country into the western ideological alliance, rendering reunification nearly impossible. This view is supported by Gregor Schöllgen,<sup>7</sup> Eric G. Frey,<sup>8</sup> and Herbert Lilge.<sup>9</sup> The opposing school of thought holds that the Federal Republic only attained semi-sovereignty at best, a position strongly argued by Peter Katzenstein.<sup>10</sup> However, they concur with the first group that sovereignty was valued higher by the Bonn government than reunification.

### **The Road to the *Hallstein Doctrine***

In March 1952, the infamous ‘Stalin Note’ hardened the East-West division of the WWII victors and reinforced Chancellor Adenauer’s ‘policy of strength’ towards the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> Only two months later, the *Deutschlandvertrag* was signed by Adenauer and the High

---

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmann, Arne. *The Emergence of Détente in Europe: Brandt, Kennedy and the formation of Ostpolitik*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Hubatsch, Walther, et al. *The German Question: A Documentary*. Trans. S. Attanasio. (New York: Herder Book Center, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 53-58.

<sup>8</sup> Frey, Eric G. *Division and Détente: The Germanies and Their Allies*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Lilge, Herbert. *Deutschland von 1955-1963: von den Pariser Verträgen bis zum Ende der Ära Adenauer*, Hefte zum Zeitgeschehen: Heft 10 (Hannover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1965), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Katzenstein, Peter J. *Policy and Politics in West Germany: The Growth of a Semisovereign State*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Schwarz, Konrad. *Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution and Reconstruction (Volume II – The Statesman: 1952-1967)*, 8-9.

Commissioners.<sup>12</sup> Gregor Schöllgen and Eric Frey described this as a watershed moment for the Bonn government; when implemented in 1955, the Federal Republic could - superficially - consider itself a sovereign country.<sup>13</sup> However, Article 2(I) held three significant restrictions for the Bonn government: Allied troops continued to maintain their presence in Germany; West Berlin remained under direct control of the Western Allies; and an official peace treaty would only be signed once Germany was reunified.<sup>14</sup> The document clearly stated that the Federal Republic was strictly bound to the Western ideological framework and thus faced restrictions in its foreign policy. Expanding on Peter Katzenstein's argument, the Federal Republic was firmly under US' foreign policy guidance which is exemplified by the newly established Foreign Minister echoing the main policies of the - predominantly American - Allies. Nevertheless, it re-established the country's membership in the world community by joining the Bretton Woods institutions and the European Steel and Coal Community.<sup>15</sup>

Bonn's domestic and foreign policy culminated in the *Hallstein Doctrine* that was officially introduced after the Moscow Conference in 1955. The Doctrine stated that any diplomatic recognition of the German Democratic Republic by a third country was seen as an *acte peu amicable* - a hostile act directed against the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>16</sup> Based on the *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* (sole representation claim), the Bonn government held that the

---

<sup>12</sup> The official name in Germany is as follows: *Vertrag über die Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und den Drei Mächten*. In the United States and Great Britain, the treaty was considered as the *General Treaty*.

<sup>13</sup> Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 53-58; Frey, Eric G. *Division and Détente: The Germanies and Their Allies*, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Das Auswärtige Amt. *Die Auswärtige Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1972), 209.

<sup>15</sup> Katzenstein, *Policy and Politics in West Germany: The Growth of a Semisovereign State*, 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. *Erklärung Adenauers vor dem Deutschen Bundestag zur Moskauer Reise, 22. September 1955*. (Accessed October 10, 2014).

<http://www.konrad-adenauer.de/downloads/pdf/Adenauer/1955-09-22%20Erklaerung%20Adenauer%20Moskau-Reise.pdf>

‘Pankow’ regime, a derogative term used by West German politicians to describe the SED-led government in East Germany,<sup>17</sup> represented the ‘abnormal division of German’ and forced the East German people into a political, economic, and social system that they resented.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, in such cases the Federal Republic threatening particularly Third World countries with reduced economic aid and, at the very extreme, breaking off diplomatic ties.<sup>19</sup> However, the big exception was the Soviet Union. It was argued by Wilhelm Grewe, its principal author, that this outright break with the doctrine was justified since the Potsdam Agreement was also signed by the Soviet Union, making it therefore a necessary condition to establish diplomatic relations in order to eventually achieve reunification.<sup>20</sup>

### **Interregnum: the appearance of inertia**

The second half of the 1950s saw the decreasing importance of the ‘German Question.’ The attention of the Cold War superpowers shifted towards more imminent crisis in Eastern Europe and North Africa. This strikingly highlighted the little influence Bonn actually had on international developments. Statements made by Adenauer continuously called for the maintenance and reinforcement of his ‘policy of strength’ which was perceived as the only way

---

<sup>17</sup> “SED” is an acronym for the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*). It was formed out of the forced union of the Eastern Chapter of the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party in 1946 by the Soviet Union. From thereon, the SED ruled as the GDR.

<sup>18</sup> Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. *Erklärung Adenauers vor dem Deutschen Bundestag zur Moskau Reise, 22. September 1955*. (emphasizes from the document.)

<sup>19</sup> Dulles, Eleanor L. *One Germany or Two: The Struggle at the Heart of Europe*. (Stanford: Hoover Institute Publications, 1970), 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> Gray, William G. *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 37-39; Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. *Interview mit Wilhelm Grewe zur Hallstein-Doktrin, Bonn, den 13. Dezember 1955*.

to deal with such a Soviet-led ‘policy of violence.’<sup>21</sup> Encouraged by the widespread support domestically in conjunction with the economic miracle, Adenauer saw no need to modify his stance towards either of the superpowers.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, he became increasingly paranoid of a Washington-Moscow rapprochement. The Cuban Missile Crisis had dramatically shown the limitations of the policy of *nuclear deterrence*. Therefore, the superpowers were increasingly less prepared to risk military confrontation and thus potential total destruction of their country over the ‘German Question’.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, Adenauer feared that a *détente* would ultimately mean that the fate of the German people would primarily be decided under Cold War considerations, and he sought to torpedo any potential acceptance of the existing *status quo*. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1960s it appeared as if the superpowers had arranged themselves with the division of Germany.

The erection of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, forcefully ejected the Bonn government out of its rigid stance of being the sole representative of the German *Volk*.<sup>24</sup> The primary reason of the wall’s erection was the increasing human drainage from the East to the West. Not only was this “voting with their feet” constantly weakening the economic conditions of the Pankow regime but it was a hugely humiliating moral defeat towards the capitalistic arch

---

<sup>21</sup> Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg. *Rede von Konrad Adenauer über den Aufstand in Ungarn (Hannover, 26. Oktober 1956)*. (Accessed November 01, 2014). [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/rede\\_von\\_konrad\\_adenauer\\_uber\\_den\\_aufstand\\_in\\_ungarn\\_hannover\\_26\\_oktober\\_1956-de-ba0ae7d6-e4eb-49b4-87b6-37eebdd3e878.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/rede_von_konrad_adenauer_uber_den_aufstand_in_ungarn_hannover_26_oktober_1956-de-ba0ae7d6-e4eb-49b4-87b6-37eebdd3e878.html)

<sup>22</sup> ARD: Das Erste. *Jahresrückblick 1957: Adenauer wird erneut Bundeskanzler*. (Accessed October 14, 2014). <http://www.tagesschau.de/jahresrueckblick/meldung227204.html>. It was exemplified by his campaign slogan “Keine Experimente” - no experiments. Please see Hanrieder. “West German Foreign Policy, 1949-1979: Necessities and Choices,” In W. F. Hanrieder, *West German Foreign Policy: 1949-1979*, 18-20; Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Osterheld, Horst. “Konrad Adenauer” in Hans Klein *The German Chancellors*. Trans. E. McCown, (Chicago: edition q, 1996), 52; Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 75; Banchoff, Thomas. *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995*. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 55.

enemy in the West. But what looked as a resounding diplomatic success was in reality another example of West Germany's very limited power in influencing the 'German Question'. The initial feet-dragging in Washington was met with horror in Bonn, and Moscow through its pantomime in East Berlin had factually divided Germany into two states.<sup>25</sup> It epitomized the ultimate failure of Adenauer's 'policy of strength'.

In 1963 Adenauer was acrimoniously forced to resign, to be succeeded by the 'godfather' of the German *Wirtschaftswunder*, Ludwig Erhard.<sup>26</sup> However, being always judged against his predecessor he quite spectacularly failed to meet the high expectations.<sup>27</sup> Only two years later he was replaced by Kurt-Georg Kiesinger who in 1966 formed a Grand Coalition with the centre-left Social Democrats.<sup>28</sup> But also this chancellor lacked the will and political power base in his own party to decisively break with the increasingly unrealistic and doctrinaire foreign policy of the past. It was rather Vice Chancellor Willy Brandt who grasped the growing sentiment of the German people for change, and gradually shifted the country's policy towards the East. But true change had to wait for another three years.

### **Ostpolitik: The Adjustment to Domestic and International Pressures**

September 28th 1969 saw a 'political earthquake.' For the first time a Social Democrat became Chancellor and the Conservatives were not part of the ruling government. One of the major contributing factors was the charismatic figure of Willy Brandt, who had achieved 'hero'

---

<sup>25</sup> Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 74-75. Brandt, Willy. *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975*. Trans. J. M. Brownjohn, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 21.

<sup>26</sup> Osterheld, Horst. "Konrad Adenauer" in Hans Klein *The German Chancellors*. Trans. E. McCown, (Chicago: edition q, 1996), 53.

<sup>27</sup> Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Diehl, Günter, "Kurt Georg Kiesinger" in Hans Klein *The German Chancellors*. Trans. E. McCown, pp. 141-194 (Chicago: edition q, 1996), 168.

status due to his steadfastness as mayor of West Berlin during the Berlin Wall crisis.<sup>29</sup> His new *Ostpolitik* was rooted in the belief that the Hallstein Doctrine had led the country into a dead-end street.<sup>30</sup> Brandt wanted to overcome the passive bystander situation from the past decade and not to rely on the superpowers for changes in Europe. As such, *Ostpolitik* represented an active involvement of the Bonn government towards East Germany, a systemic foreign policy change that became apparent in his ‘two states but one nation’ statement.<sup>31</sup> Brandt acknowledged the factual existence of the German Democratic Republic and the ideological divisions splitting the country into two. However, falling short of formally recognizing the GDR, preserved the potential for reunification by fostering the idea of one inclusive *Kulturnation* (cultural nation).<sup>32</sup> Through his famous policy of *Wandel durch Annaeherung* (change through convergence) Brandt replaced the previous dogma of confrontation and exclusion by an approach of consecutive small steps to gradually create a climate of cooperation. The greatly superior economic success of West Germany would ever closer bind the East towards its neighbour, and ultimately pave the path for reunification. The Western Allies openly voiced their suspicion that this *Sonderweg* (special path) would lead to neutrality and provide the groundwork for a potential rise of nationalistic policies again.<sup>33</sup> However, in practice it allowed Bonn much greater

---

<sup>29</sup> Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Wilkens, “New *Ostpolitik* and European integration: Concept and policies in the Brandt era” in N. Piers Ludlow *European Integration and the Cold War: Ostpolitik-Westpolitik, 1965-1973*, 67; Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 118.

<sup>31</sup> Tilford, “Introduction” in R. B. Tilford *The Ostpolitik and Political Change in Germany*, 4; Bierling, *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Normen, Akteure, Entscheidungen*, 173.

<sup>32</sup> Paterson, “The *Ostpolitik* and Régime Stability in West Germany” in R. B. Tilford *The Ostpolitik and Political Change in Germany*, 34-35.

<sup>33</sup> Schöllgen, *Deutsche Außenpolitik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, 143. For further information concerning the tensions between Brandt and Nixon’s National Security Advisor please refer to Brandt’s memoirs *People and Politics: The Years 1960-1975*. The idea of the more autonomous policies of Brandt would clash with America’s leadership is explored in Bierling, Stephan. *Die Außenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Normen, Akteure, Entscheidungen* (2. Ed.). (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005), 174-177.



freedom in international diplomacy than under previous Chancellors whilst simultaneously “forcing” the superpowers to continuously engage with the German government.

Domestically the new *Ostpolitik* split the nation in half. In an emotionally highly charged atmosphere Brandt faced a parliamentary vote of no confidence in April 1972 which he narrowly survived.<sup>34</sup> The ensuing national elections became a triumphant success for the SPD vindicating his new policy towards the East. Despite all criticism, nationally and internationally, the door was pushed open for a more relaxed and cooperative relationship between the two German states. West Germany’s foreign policy had ‘emancipated’ and paved the way to pursue a different path for solving the ‘German Question.’

## **Conclusion**

The election of Adenauer promised stability, peace, and strength by firmly embedding the Federal Republic into the Western Bloc. As the Western ‘poster child,’ the room for maneuver was very limited and Adenauer’s confrontational policy with the GDR culminated in the Hallstein Doctrine. The ‘German Question’ remained unsolved and was increasingly infused by ideological dogmatism. Willy Brandt’s rise to power and his daring approach towards the East-West conflict was supported by a gradual shift in sentiment of the German population. His *Ostpolitik* signified a new move towards the ‘German Question,’ as it proposed a policy of ‘Germanic détente.’ It did not solve the ‘German Question’ but it was a major step in normalizing relations between West and East Germany. Moreover, the research has shown that both Chancellor Adenauer and Brandt were concerned with the reunification and sovereignty,

---

<sup>34</sup> It is today known that the two CDU/CSU members switching sides were bribed by the East German Secret Service.

making them necessary focal points of their governments. Therefore, the diametrically opposed interpretation of the Hallstein Doctrine and Ostpolitik should be reconsidered under the guidance that the *means* and *actions* were incompatible but that the *fundamentals* of both Chancellors' policies broadly followed a common thread.