

# GERMAN LEADERSHIP IN EU FOREIGN POLICY AFTER EUROZONE CRISIS?

**Merve Yavuz**

Islamic Azad University, Najafabad, Iran.

## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Federal Republic of Germany in European Union (EU)'s foreign policy after Eurozone crisis. To do that, firstly, EU foreign policy and the importance of member states' foreign policies are summarized briefly. After that some basic features of German foreign policy are stated. Germany is an important member of EU as the largest economy. Also, historically power of Germany has always been a heated topic in Europe since it was famously the cause of two world wars. Eurozone crisis is taken as the turning point in Germany's EU policy since it was the first time Germany was the sole leader of the crisis without its traditional partner France failing to fulfill its role of co-hegemon. After looking at some basic features of German foreign policy and Eurozone crisis, Ukraine crisis is given as the case to understand Germany's role in European Union's foreign policy. To comprehend Ukraine crisis and Germany, European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership (EaP) and relations between Germany and Russia are also mentioned.

## INTRODUCTION

Germany is one of the most important states of Europe today. Not only because of its strong economy but also because of its leadership role in several crisis European Union has faced in recent years. EU-Turkey refugee deal can be given as the most recent example of this role. However, in this study we will focus on two other significant events in European politics: Eurozone crisis and Ukrainian conflict. Before analyzing these two topics, we will first look at the foreign policy of European Union. It is important to understand what opportunities EU gives to its member states in foreign policy area. Secondly, national foreign policies of member states will be discussed. Although, EU gives member states greater ability to conduct foreign policy, national foreign policies of member states did not lose their validity. After that, the study continues with historical understanding of German foreign policy. Which topics are priority in German foreign policy and where EU stands will be shown.

When it comes to Eurozone crisis, it is important to look at how the crisis began and what stand Germany took and during the crisis and why it did so. Also, repercussions of German role in the crisis and reactions that it caused among other Eurozone members will be shown. After Eurozone, Ukraine is chosen as the case to understand Germany's role in EU foreign policy. To comprehend this role, it is significant to understand Ostpolitik of Germany and German-Russian relations. During the crisis in Ukraine, Germany once again had the role of leadership. However, it is necessary to understand how Germany end up in that role once again and what were the reasons behind it. By analyzing these two important events and understanding Germany's role, the conclusion part of this study will try to answer whether or not Germany has had a role of leadership in foreign policy of European Union after the Eurozone crisis.

## **EU FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL FOREIGN POLICIES**

Officially described, European Union foreign and security policy is the policy that enables the EU to speak and act as one in world affairs and it gives the EU's 28 members far greater clout than they would have if each pursued its own policies. This means that EU foreign policy aims for greater accomplishment by acting together with a coherent policy than what member states could reach themselves. There are several reasons for this. First of all, EU has a far-reaching capacity to develop foreign policy in certain areas. Trade policy can be said to be most important example of this. EU gives opportunities to its member states that are greater than what they can accomplish by themselves. Secondly, EU gives its member states separate stand from that of USA's. Especially during the Cold War, Western Europe was important part of what described as the Western block under the leadership of United States. Today, bipolar system of the Cold War does not exist anymore but Europe and United States are still considered as the members of the same camp, the West. In this respect, EU helps its member states to have a different identity from that of United States. Finally, European Union provides member states to develop a structural foreign policy. Structural foreign policy is a foreign policy that aims to shape or influence political, economic, security or other structure in a certain space. It is conducted to create structural changes. These changes cannot be provided by only one country's will. Acting within EU gives the member states a possibility to achieve structural changes that cannot be done by acting alone. When we look at all these reasons, we can clearly see that EU enables its members to conduct their foreign policies on a broader scope.

However, although official definition claims that EU foreign policy gives its member states greater possibility for influence, national foreign policies of member states are also still important. EU foreign policy is not only conducted through Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/ Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) but also with the foreign policies of member states. And although there are common purposes of member states when it comes to EU foreign policy, there are differences among their national foreign policies too. These differences mainly stem from divergence between member states' power and capabilities, their interests and their world view. For example, France and UK (Although UK decided to leave European Union following Brexit referendum in June 2016, it is considered as EU member for this study since the official process is not triggered at the time being) are the only ones that have both nuclear power and veto power at UN Security Council. This gives them greater space to act for security policies. Also, UK's relations with the states of Commonwealth of Nations (former colonies of the British Empire) provides it with important diplomatic connections that others do not have. Furthermore, different interests of member states lead them to pursue different foreign policy goals. For instance, during US President George W. Bush's "war on terror" and following war in Iraq there was a strong reaction from Germany and France while United Kingdom supported US policies alongside with Central and Eastern European states. And finally, their different world views, which are ideas about how the world should be, can generate different actions. Therefore, it can be concluded that even though member states follow common policies under European Union, their national foreign policies are still important to them and these national policies affect EU's actions too.

## **GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY**

German foreign policy has had important consequences for Europe and for the rest of the world too. Two different times at history, assertive German foreign policies led to total wars: World War I & II. Since the unification of Germany in 1871, German question has been very significant for Europe. Henry Kissinger describes German question as following;

Germany's role is too big for Europe, too small for world. What Kissinger means is that when Germany is powerful, it stands as a threat to other European countries. This is one of the reasons for its demilitarization at the end of the WWI and its occupation by Allied forces at the end of the Second World War. Therefore, it can be claimed that German foreign policy has been also very important for European countries, especially Germany's neighbors. This is why there were many questions concerning reunification of Germany at the end of the Cold War. European countries were not sure about the repercussions that they would face when there is a reunified Germany in the middle of Europe. This is also the reason that German politicians are very careful when they explain the foreign policy of Germany. They are aware of the historical burdens that Germany carries especially because of the horrors of WWII. German Chancellor Angela Merkel accepts that in one of her speech. She says that "the worst period of hatred happened not even a generation ago, and it was done in the name of my people"

Federal Republic of Germany was founded in 1949, four years after the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich. During the Cold War period the most important aim for European allies of Western block was the containment of Soviet Union. This included Germany too. For Federal Germany, Atlantic alliance was very important for its security since Soviet Union has one of its nuclear bases in neighboring East Germany (GDR). First part of a strong Atlantic alliance was based on good relations between United States and Western Europe. Second part was to have strong alliance within Europe. Therefore, Europe was very significant part of German foreign policy. In this respect, Federal Republic of Germany became one of the founders of European Steel and Coal Community (ESCC) which finally evolved into European Union. Moreover, Europeanization gave Germany a possibility for embracing a new identity. Having disturbed European balance of power twice in two world wars, Germany avoided pursuing its national interest explicitly and instead pursued its policies on the European level.

Franco-German relations have been at the core of the Germany's European policy. The root of Franco-German relations based on the explicit political will of both countries to put an end to a disastrous relationship since the unification of Germany in 1871. The Elysée Treaty of 1963 was the result of this will of Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer to consolidate friendship between France and Federal Republic of Germany. It paved the way to cooperation between two states. During the following period, Germany relied on France's political credibility in EU policies in exchange for economic benefits to France. Leading role for Germany alone might have caused strong reactions from other European states. Thus, acting together with France gave Germany political opportunities that otherwise may not been possible. This co-hegemonic leadership of France and Germany worked most of the time until the Eurozone crisis.

Fall of Berlin Wall in 9th of November 1989 is followed by reunification of Germany and end of Cold War. Federal Republic's Chancellor Helmut Kohl wanted further integration in Europe during this period. For integration policy, once again Germany had to rely on cooperation with France since a unified Germany would mean more assertive Germany. In the immediate post-Cold War years, Europeanization reached to its zenith. Both Germany became more European and Europe became Germanized with replacement of Deutschmark and the Bundesbank by the euro and the European Central Bank (ECB).

There has been a gradual decline about Germany's perception of Europeanization. First reason for this was the enlargement of EU. Enlargement had the possibility of making core EU policies like Common Agricultural Policy unaffordable. This led to more defensive posture on the part of France and Chancellor Schröder's Germany. Moreover, new generation of politicians did not have the direct experience of WWII and therefore they were more eager to talk about German national interest. For instance, Schröder argued in 1998 that Germany standing up for its national interest will be just as natural as France or Britain standing up for

theirs. Furthermore, the population of former East Germany did not have the historic enthusiasm of citizens of Federal Republic who could associate the EU membership with prosperity. In 2005 Angela Merkel, who had spent thirty-five years of her life in in GDR, became the chancellor of Federal Republic. Although she puts Europe at the center of German foreign policy, she had been also one of the outsiders to EU as a GDR citizen.

To conclude, foreign policy of federal republic of Germany has been a pro-European one. During the Cold War, Germany saw strong alliance at both sides of Atlantic as its goal. Therefore, Germany is one of the founders of ESCC and supporter of European integration. Relations between France and Germany were at the center of Germany's European policy. However, even before the Eurozone crisis, there was a decline in Germany's pro-European stand. As we can see now, this decline would continue during the crisis both in Germany and in other Eurozone states.

## EUROZONE CRISIS AND GERMANY

The global economic crisis began on 15th September 2008, with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in the United States and by October 2009 it shifted into the budgets of European States. Everywhere in Europe national debts were growing and governments had to help to failing banks which actually meant exposing themselves to risk. Worst news came from Athens when it was revealed that the budget deficit of Greece increased to twelve percent of gross domestic product (GDP) instead of six percent. Ratings agency Fitch downgraded Greece's credit rating which made borrowing money extremely expensive for the country. This led to a harmful circle of high debts, a high demand for credit, and even more expensive loans. To break free from this chain, Greece needed to reduce its debts. However, economy had to grow and for that to happen, income from taxation needed to be increased. This meant spending cuts and it would lead to reduction of social security, pensions and healthcare costs. These all were extremely difficult for Greece and its government was unable to act. Normally, when states in this difficult position, they usually issue a new currency or devalue the old one. However, Greece was not able to do this since euro was used as currency of sixteen other countries of European Union. If Greece were allowed to go bankrupt in an uncontrolled way, it would take some other states in EU. Moreover, Greek banks were closely related to other European banks and bankruptcy would cause a domino effect in other banks in Europe. Or if Greece were allowed to leave the Eurozone, it would raise questions about the validity of Eurozone and would cause the collapse of the system.

On 23rd April 2010, Greece applied for aid from European Union and International Monetary Fund. Even though Chancellor Merkel's initial response had been insisting that Greece's problem was an internal one and that Greece had to solve it with austerity measures, on 10th May of the same year European Financial Stability Facility was established and rescue plan for Greece was agreed. However, in the summer of 2011, Greece was once again on the edge of bankruptcy. 2010 aid was expanded to 109 billion euros. In the meantime, Ireland and Portugal had followed Greece while interest rates of Spanish and Italian government loans went up and European Central Bank had to buy these loans. At that point it became clear that the crisis was not about individual countries, it was the crisis of the Eurozone.

Germany had to have the role of leadership during the Eurozone crisis for economic reasons. It was the largest state in terms of population, gross domestic product and gross national product. Moreover, its unemployment rate was the lowest in Eurozone and its nominal unit labor cost increased less. Thus, Germany was the dominant country in the Eurozone who was contributing most to the bailout funds. Also, French economy had lost its

strength making the role of leadership available solely for Germany. Therefore, Germany has played a dominant role in advocating solutions to the Eurozone crisis and other actors including EU institutions had to accept this role. As someone in Merkel's office said "It came to the point where we didn't go to Brussels, everyone came to us"

Germany's dominant role in the Eurozone crisis once again brought German question back to the agenda. It showed that in economic terms Germany was the strongest country in Europe. Moreover, Merkel's conditionality for Greece demonstrates that Germany followed its national interest while making the decisions. Merkel wanted other European states to maintain their ability to purchase German products. That is why she needed their economies to grow. Another result of Eurozone crisis was that it was not another scene of co-hegemony of France and Germany. With France's weakened economy, relations between two states became asymmetrical. Also, Franco-German relationship was very difficult to synchronize with the pace of the financial markets. Furthermore, during the Eurozone crisis, Europe witnessed what we can call rebirth of the nation state. Firstly, EU institutions had neither the authority nor the money to intervene, member states needed to solve the problem. Secondly, as it is already mentioned dominant role of Germany was not well received in other states. National prejudices suddenly reappeared. Third or Fourth Reich was mentioned in articles. Merkel was compared to Bismarck or even Hitler in cartoons.

Germany's role in the Eurozone crisis is often called as "reluctant hegemon" and there are important reasons for this. First of all, Germany did not seek the role of hegemon; as the dominant economy of the Eurozone, Germany had to take action. Merkel's holding off for decision can be given as an example here. Secondly, public opinion in Germany was not very enthusiastic about the German role in the Eurozone crisis. There was a hostile press campaign which depicted that hard-working Germans had to pay for lazy Greeks. Pro-Europeanization decreased in Germany and a Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany) was founded in April 2013.

## **GERMANY AND UKRAINIAN CONFLICT**

Crisis in Ukraine is chosen for this study to analyze Germany's role in foreign policy of European Union. This case is chosen because it was a specific foreign policy issue which required a common policy of European Union. To analyze Germany's role in EU foreign policy during Ukrainian crisis, firstly we should look at the traditional relations with Russia. Then, we should understand The Eastern Partnership(EaP) before we continue with what happened during the crisis.

During the Cold War, Ostpolitik (Eastern policy) was the term to describe Federal Republic of Germany's cooperative relations with Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries which was initiated by Willy Brandt in 1969. During the Cold War, one of the examples of Ostpolitik was West Germany's willingness to engage in energy cooperation with Soviet Union. However, at the same time, Germany participated in western sanctions about technology transfer to Soviet Union. After the reunification of Germany and the end of the cold War, Ostpolitik remained as the main policy of Germany towards Russia in spite of the big changes that both countries went through (reunification for Germany, dissolution of Soviet Union for Russia). Chancellor Schröder continued the Ostpolitik tradition of cooperative relations with Russia. During the Iraq War in 2003 he wanted to have common political position with Russia. Also, he maintained close personal relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Initially, although Merkel did not have the same personal connection with Putin, there were no changes in Germany's relations with Russia. However, later on Merkel showed that she was willing to raise concerns about human rights situation in Russia. In November 2012, the Bundestag accepted a resolution that was very critical of Putin's regime.

Resolution stated that “Parliament notes with mounting concern that, since President Vladimir Putin's return to office, legislative and judicial measures are being taken which combine toward increasing control over active citizens, criminalizing critical engagement and creating a confrontation course against government critics.” Furthermore, in March 2013, German politicians protested against the Russian authorities for raiding non-governmental organizations in Russia (including some German NGOs such as Konrad Adenauer Foundation).

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is initiated by Poland and Sweden as the Eastern dimension of European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). It aimed at transforming Eastern neighbors of EU into a stable and prosperous region. Through bilateral Association Agreements which included Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs), a gradual integration through convergence with European values and norms would create a “Wider Europe” without offering an explicit membership. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were the six participating states. ENP combined different elements from development policy, trade policy to foreign and security policy. However, security and foreign policy had less priority than domestic development in EaP states.

Germany's interest in European Neighborhood Policy has been mostly about stability of the region. As the Europe's biggest trading partner, Germany valued the stable export markets. Therefore, Germany wanted a stable and prosperous neighborhood as it was declared in ENP. Moreover, although Germany supported multilateral approach of ENP, it also had very close bilateral relations with the Eastern neighbors of EU. In fact, these bilateral relations of EU member states caused inconsistencies between member states' individual goals and EU's ENP goals. Germany's strong presence and actions exceeded any other member of EU in the region. Germany has had an important soft power status in the region. This and Germany's close relations with Russia are reasons why when conflict about Ukraine occurred in the region, Germany had the role of leadership even though UK and France had been traditional foreign and security actors.

Crisis in Ukraine started when Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich refused to sign Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013. Opposition movement Euro-Maidan started with protests. Germany initially involved as part of Weimar Triangle. Weimar Triangle is a format that was initiated in 1991 by foreign ministers of Poland, Germany and France who in this format have regular meetings. Foreign ministers of Weimar countries negotiated an agreement between Yanukovich and the opposition. However, Yanukovich fled from Ukraine on 22nd February 2014 and created a security problem. Transitional government was established under Yatsenyuk which was not considered legitimate by Russia. Hence, Russia increased its troop movements in Crimea and started to take over strategic positions and finally occupied Crimea. In response for Russian actions, European Union suspended bilateral talks with Russia about visa matters. Germany wanted to pursue a three-tier crisis management framework: economic sanctions against Russia, dialogue between Ukraine and Russia and strengthening the Ukrainian states.

Merkel tried to persuade Putin to cancel the referendum in Crimea and when Putin rejected this idea, sanctions against Russia was the only choice. In gaining support from other EU members, Germany played an important role. While some members did not want economic sanctions, others were worried that sanctions were not strong enough (countries like Poland and Baltic countries because of security concerns). In addition, Merkel was personally trying to broker a solution between Russia and Ukraine to reach an agreement. She became successful when the first Minsk agreement was signed in 5th September 2014 between Moscow, Kiev and pro-Russian separatists. However, it did not last long and Minsk II agreement was negotiated on 12th February 2015.

Initially, Germany was not very willing to play a role in the conflict. As it is already mentioned, the stability in the Eastern neighborhood states was one of the foreign policy goals

of Germany. That is way Germany had to have the leadership role during Ukraine crisis. For German understanding, stability in the region was only possible with Russia. For this reason, although Germany strongly condemned Russian actions in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea and declared Russian actions as breach of international law, Germany did not apply to military means to solve the problem. Attempts were made Germany to find diplomatic solutions to the conflict. Another reason for German policy during the crisis was internal. During 2014, exports to Russia were cut by 20% and 50.000 German jobs were at risk. The Committee on East European Relations of the German Economy (Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft) criticized the EU sanctions against Russia and warned about the negative consequences for Germany. Thus, it can be claimed that Germany had its own reasons for the policy that was followed during Ukraine crisis and therefore assumed the role of leadership.

## CONCLUSION

National foreign policies have been important dimension of foreign policy of European Union. German foreign policy is not an exception. In fact, it can be the most influential one since Germany had to have the always dominant role in two recent crises. For Federal Republic of Germany, Europe is very important. It is at the center of the foreign policy of Germany. Since the Cold War years, stability in Europe and a strong alliance in Europe have been the number one priority for Germany. Germany's relations with France lies at the heart of its European policy. Germany cannot explicitly assume the role of leadership. Therefore, it needs France's cooperation for its policies. Even though there is still support for Europeanization in Germany, it is declining; especially after the Eurozone crisis.

Eurozone crisis is the extension of global financial crisis of 2008. This crisis started with Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy in United States and spread to Europe in 2010. Most severe situation was in Greece. When Greece applied for aid from European Union, eyes turned to Merkel who is the chancellor of the economically strongest state in the Eurozone. With her conditionality policy, Merkel was one of the proofs that national boundaries were still valid in European Union. She needed German economy to stay strong and therefore she did not hesitate to force Greece to accept this conditionality. Eurozone crisis weakened the role of France and the leadership had to be assumed by Germany. However, neither Merkel administration nor the German public wanted this role. Also, because of Germany's historical legacies, other Eurozone countries were very skeptical about dominant German role.

Another crisis in which Germany had to have the role of hegemon in European Union was Ukraine. As an Eastern dimension of European Neighborhood Policy, EU initiated the Eastern Partnership. One of the countries of EaP was Ukraine. Association Agreement marked the beginning of a very problematic period in Ukraine. President Yanukovich did not want to sign the agreement. Protests in the streets followed during the Euro-Maidan movement in Ukraine. German Foreign Minister Steinmeier was one of the mediators between the Ukrainian government and protesters. However, when Yanukovich left the country, it created a significant security problem for Ukraine. Interim government was not recognized by Russia and Russia occupied Crimea. Once again, Germany was behind the EU's sanctions policy. On the one hand, stability in Eastern neighborhood was very important for Germany. On the other hand, Germany needed Russia for that stability. Thus, Germany did not want military means to put an end to the conflict and tried to role of mediator between Russia and Ukraine. Merkel's personal efforts resulted in two Minsk agreements. During this crisis, EU followed German policies because historically Russian relations were very important for Germany and Germany made more efforts than other European states.

In general, when we look at the German foreign policy, having a hegemon role in European Union has not been one of its goals. Both during the Eurozone crisis and Ukraine crisis Germany had to take an action because mainly it had to pursue its national interest. Also, the role of leadership was available for Germany. Eurozone was an economic crisis and Germany as the strongest economy in Europe had to have the responsibility. In respect to Russia, stability in the region was very important for EU but in particular for Germany. That is why, once again Germany had to assume the role of leadership.

To conclude, it cannot be assumed that Germany has played the role of leadership in EU foreign policy willingly. For foreign minister Steinmeier, one important reason is that Germany did not seek this role. He argues that Germany has become the central player thanks to its success in remaining stable as the world around it changed. Furthermore, German leadership is largely confined to economic zone. To be effective in foreign policy decisions of EU, military means in addition to economic capabilities are needed. However, Germany does not possess such capacity. In 2015, for example, according to International Institute for Strategic Studies Germany's defense budget was \$36.7 billion. It is less than United Kingdom (\$56.2 billion) and France (\$46.8). It looks even more inadequate when we consider defense budget in relation to size of the economy. Also, size of Bundeswehr, its armed forces, is smaller than the Cold War period. Furthermore, there have been some instances in which Germany refrained from using military power. Example of Ukraine is already given. Germany was also against Iraq war of 2003 against Saddam Hussein and did not participate in France-led intervention in Libya in 2011.

To sum up, Germany had the role of leadership during the Eurozone but it did not mark the beginning of German leadership in EU foreign policy. For the reasons that are given above, so-called German leadership is very limited in the content of foreign policy. Ukraine was another crisis that Germany was the main actor in the European scene. However, this role stemmed from importance of region for Germany and its national interests. In conclusion, Germany does not have the role of hegemon for foreign policy of European Union. In fact, Germany is more interested in promoting multilateralism and sharing responsibilities.

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