

Germany's European Policy— and Beyond

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Deutsche Europapolitik. Von Adenauer bis Merkel

[German European Policy. From Adenauer to Merkel], by Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, Corina Schukraft, Nicole Leuchtweis and Ulrike Keßler. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. 2010

When Czech president Václav Klaus signed the Lisbon Treaty on 3 November 2009, a long period of turmoil for the European Union ended. After years of failed referenda, a so-called period of reflection, and severe frictions between member states, the EU is seemingly back on track, not the least due to German efforts, mainly during their presidency of the European Council in 2007. Time to take a deep breath and look back to the tide of events that finally led to the happy ending in Prague. Focusing on German European Policy, this is what Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet does in her contribution to the recently published second edition of *Deutsche Europapolitik. Von Adenauer bis Merkel*.

Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, professor of European and international politics, and her co-authors Corina Schukraft, Nicole Leuchtweis, and Ulrike Keßler aim to assess Germany's contribution to European integration while simultaneously looking for continuity or change in the administrations' approaches a focus that is dominating all the chapters. Whereas the first three parts, which deal with the chancellorships of Konrad Adenauer, Ludwig Erhard and Kurt Georg Kiesinger (Schukraft), Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt (Leuchtweis), and Helmut Kohl (Keßler), have not been changed in comparison to the first edition that was published in 2002, Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet has extended her account of German European Policy under the Red-Green government, now also covering the second term (2002–05) of Gerhard Schröder's chancellorship. Moreover, she has added an analysis of the European Policy of the Grand Coalition (2005–09) under chancellor Angela Merkel, constituting almost one-third of the book's 349 pages, making it not only an updated but also significantly expanded second edition. This review will mainly concentrate on these two chapters.

To sum up Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet's conclusion on Red-Green European Policy, she argues that Chancellor Schröder occasionally acted in a "brute" way, "provoking and snubbing" (pp. 243–44) Brussels and other member states when fighting for German interests but fundamentally stuck to the German integration-friendly consensus. The author is keen to emphasize that the administration showed extraordinary commitment for the European

Constitutional Treaty. However, when Schröder left office in November 2005, the reform process lay in shreds, making the lack of a “big success” the most striking, almost tragic feature of Schröder’s European legacy—in spite of exceptional efforts (p. 211). Thus, Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet fittingly characterizes the European Policy of the Red-Green coalition as an “investment in the future of the EU” (p. 245).

The question whether Angela Merkel continued on this way sets the tone for the chapter on the Grand Coalition’s European Policy. Did the new administration draw on Schröder’s preparatory work? Or did national interests prevail? Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet convincingly argues that Merkel quickly became Europe’s white hope in a time of “abysmal perplexity” (p. 264), euphemistically dubbed “period of reflection,” as she firmly held on to the Constitutional Treaty. In an extensive analysis of the first six months of 2007, it becomes clear that Germany’s presidency of the European Council can rightly be described as the “*pièce de résistance*” (p. 270) of Merkel’s European policy, culminating in the approval of a so-called roadmap at the European Summit in June 2007. By promoting this roadmap, which, in fact, was a concrete mandate for the subsequent intergovernmental conference, Merkel led the way to end the EU’s constitutional crisis as the document addressed and solved all the controversial issues, e.g., the allocation of votes in the Council, the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the removal of state-like symbols. Even though Merkel could rely on “aides” (e.g., Nicolas Sarkozy or Jean-Claude Juncker) during negotiations, she deserves the credit of saving the substance of the Constitutional Treaty and transferring it into the new agreement, a “strong achievement,” as Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet puts it (p. 285). Nevertheless, even in July 2009, when the book was finished, the constitutional crisis wasn’t over yet; not until 1 December 2009, after the successful second Irish referendum and the end of Czech and Polish obstructionism, did the Lisbon Treaty become effective.

On top of that, the financial and economic crisis has been confronting the EU with even more problems than that, at first, the union wasn’t able to address with one voice, due in no small part to German hesitation, as Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet indicates. That was the time when Merkel was called “Madame No” or “Angela Faint-hearted.” In her highly topical chapter on the current state of the European Union, the author dissects the chancellor’s reaction to the crisis and the criticism that arose, concluding that Merkel’s star was seemingly sinking. Yet, in 2009, the joint initiative of Germany and France to hold a special summit paved the way for unanimous decisions on the regulation of financial markets. While Merkel had obstructed a common European position in the beginning, her and President Sarkozy’s action now let the EU speak with one voice at the G20 summit in April 2009, demonstrating the author is right to state that Merkel has found her way back to her leading role in Europe.

The author does not confine herself to Berlin’s dealing with the EU constitutional and economic crises. On the contrary, Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, who has published extensively on EU Foreign Policy, provides breakdowns of Germany’s role in CFSP (Common Foreign Security Policy) and ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy) as well as the area of freedom, security, and justice, to just name a few. Besides, she offers an account of actors and internal factors of influence in German European Policy making and gives a state-of-the-art characterization of Franco-German relations, asking whether Merkel and Sarkozy

could revive the so-called engine of European integration after their initial difficulties in 2007 and 2008.

Notwithstanding justified praise, Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet does not fully endorse the administration's approach vis-à-vis Europe. She criticizes a certain lack of vision in Merkel's European policy. Despite the success in the field of constitutional reform, the author does not see a distinctive signature of Merkel on the last four years of European German policy. She argues the chancellor failed to give the European Union a new perspective, a project that sets the agenda now that the new treaty is in force. This criticism seems a bit harsh, given the fact that Merkel had to deal with two severe crises and that the new institutional foundations, which lay down the framework for new initiatives that had not been set until late 2009. One has to concede to the author that the chancellor's European policy at times seemed "soulless," e.g., for not giving the general public an understanding why European integration should still be considered a fundamental element of German reason of state and for not sufficiently communicating the "added value of Europe" (p. 343). German European Policy, it appears, is becoming more and more pragmatic, combining the European-friendly consensus more and more with the promotion of German interests. Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet encapsulates her assessment of the last four years of German European Policy by describing it as "pragmatism without visionary impetus for the future of European integration." Following her re-election in September 2009, Merkel may use her second term to "inspirit" her European policy, as the author suggests (p. 343).

All in all, Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet et al. provide a concise yet admirably comprehensive account of German European Policy since 1949. The volume can without a doubt be called the standard work on Berlin's policy vis-à-vis Europe. Academics will enjoy its highly analytical approach. Because of its clear structure and language, it's also an ideal textbook, suited well for students of European integration, international relations, or German politics. By studying the book, the reader will not only have a better understanding of German European Policy but en passant a deep, up-to-date understanding of European integration in general. In fact, the title doesn't do full justice to the volume's scope; it's about German European Policy—and beyond.