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from Stable Abnormality to a Normality of Flux

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GERMANY'S NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY
From stable abnormality to a normality of flux

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GERMANY'S NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

From stable abnormality to a normality of flux¹

Ulf Hedetoft

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I

This paper deals with the much-discussed question of German post-war identity, its (ab)normality and its evolution over recent years. The discussion is predicated on and rooted in the discourses and images of normality and normalization that have haunted the debate as either a desirable goal to be pursued by political and cultural actors in Germany or as a negative ideal whose realization would involve the return of Germany from being a subdued giant to--once again--being a political actor throwing its weight around and conducting politics according to great-power ambitions. On this view (which has by and large been found in neighbouring European countries scared of a repeat of history, but also within Germany), "normality" has a specific content spelling "realism", "maximization of power" and "withdrawal from European integration".²

¹ This paper was presented at the biennial US-ECSA conference in Pittsburgh, June 3-5 1999, in a roundtable on the German Council Presidency, organized by Carl Lankowski. It is due to be published in a volume edited by Lankowski with Berghahn publishers.

² For a sound and detailed recent discussion of the German normality debate and its ramifications for foreign policy stances, see Bach, 1999.

This article proposes another take on the notions of normality and normalization. First of all, “normalization” is not conceived as implying a return to orthodox sovereignty or some other outdated model of international cooperation and hardline “Realpolitik”, nor as involving a retreat from Europe. Basically, what constitutes normality and therefore normalization is not a predefined given consisting of specific contents and particular meanings, but is a question of relational perception and contextual value-ascription. Bluntly put, if a country sees itself and is seen by others as being a normal country behaving normally and with every right to a normal political identity, then so be it, independently of any specific feature that might characterize its polity, policies or behaviour. It all depends on how it is perceptually constructed, whether there is consensual agreement on this construction, and what kind of value is ascribed to a country in the comparative context of international relations and internationally condoned practice. More specifically, “normality” can be conceived along three major axes: (a) relations between self-images and images of “others”; (b) relations with the national past; (c) political and cultural self-confidence--and ways of linking and speaking to such issues. It is thus very significantly a question of political discourse, i.e. of the way in which such terms become handled and instrumentalized for specific goals, develop into nodal points of reference for understanding and (re)acting on particular developments. In this way, “normality” is a consensually based international construction with very real consequences for political practice, political style and political rhetoric.

Specifically in the German context, “normality”/“normalization” is a question of overcoming the sharp edges of the dualities and oppositions of post-war history--of being able to perceive and tackle this history *as* history and not as an unbearable dimension of and burden in the present, as something that has the potential to point forward rather than manically backwards, and as something that does not need to be talked about in guilt-ridden and contrite tones--or else treated as a taboo. Here it is significant not to draw a sharp line of division between “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (“mastering the past”) and “Schlussstrichmentalität” (“mentality of drawing the final line”). They do not exclude each other. The question for “normality” and of putting an end to this particular (hi)story in Germany can more pertinently be formulated as a question of how to integrate a sense of the past into some form of “banal” (Billig, 1995) German national identity, but not how to exclude the past from present-day memory. In this sense, “normality” as a state equals

“banality” as a form of sedimented consciousness (normality has set in when no-one any longer addresses the issue), whereas “normalization” refers to an evolutionary process of discourse as well as practice, a process based on the application of a variety of political means in order to plead for/achieve the state of “normality”. What matters, then, is the degree to which German elites and the German people still see (or don’t see) themselves-- much through the imagined eyes of the outside beholder/arbitrator-- *as* abnormal, extraordinary and stigmatized, react in an apologetic way to this extraneously generated but domestically internalized self-image, but also--as far as elites go--try to capitalize on it in the context of international and European politics.

II

It is appropriate to begin these observations on what is often referred to as ‘the German Question’, the country’s way of grappling with its history, identity and self-awareness, by making it clear that the author of this piece hails from a country - Denmark - which not only has a historically extremely ambiguous relation with its big southern neighbour (see e.g. Søe, 1993), but also one typified by a large degree of economic and political dependence--to the extent where it was common among Danish elites not many years ago to sarcastically refer to changes in Danish financial policies as being dictated on an hourly basis by the Bundesbank, by phone or telex, to the Danish foreign ministry. Or as another joke, applying a well-known Clausewitz dictum, has it: Denmark is the extension of Germany by other means. In the mid-80s a Danish historian phrased the same thought in slightly more neutral tones: “Geographically it is easy to see that Denmark is part of the North German lowlands. Eric Scavenius ³ once pointed out that Denmark’s position in foreign-policy terms is dependent on who controls these lowlands. And this has never been Denmark [...]. Denmark [always] was too little or Northern Germany too big [...] The division of Germany apparently made it possible for Denmark to emancipate itself from what had been its destiny, ie being constrained by relations in Northern Germany” (Mørch, 1985; my translation, UH).

³Danish foreign minister during WW II

Such assessments, with all their inferiority paraphernalia, articulate a very Danish brand of half-cynical pragmatism that on the one hand conceals a certain truth-value, on the other stands in an oddly inverse relation to the sentimental sovereign ambitions embedded in the self-referential, almost hermetic confidence of Danish national identity,⁴ its traditional aversion to all things German, and its scepticism toward European integration and European identity.⁵ These points are closely linked, for in Denmark European integration was for very long--consciously as well as on less manifest levels of awareness and evaluation--interpreted as a German ploy for recouping power, sovereignty and hegemony in Europe--more perhaps by the masses than the elites, who have by and large followed a more pragmatic line of thinking, and certainly of action.

For both social strata, and viewed from the north, Germany has played a significant agenda-setting role, both as a major political actor in Europe *eo ipso*, but also as a kind of "negative touchstone" and very significant Other for Danish identity, wedged between (degrees of) dependency and (degrees of) national self-confidence and perceptions of homogeneity. From this vantage-point, Germany has very much been seen as and acted upon as a European megalith with clearly defined goals and a confident, self-delineated trajectory for the future: the teleology of a great power in the making.

However it is worth turning the tables on this small-nation, peripheral perspective: For this interaction between real dependency and a symbolic sovereignty of identity, between weakness and strength in Denmark (which as its consequence has had Denmark's well-known minimalism in issues of European integration in order to ensure the continuation of its perception of cultural sovereignty and exceptionalism) can in an interesting way be used as measuring rod for gauging the German position on similar matters of national and European identity, on weakness and strength, on dependency and self-sufficiency. A recent book written in this vein is aptly called *The German Predicament* (Markovits & Reich, 1997). Germany is a country centrally defined along a number of historical and

⁴ In the same text, for instance, Søren Mørch notes with some *Schadenfreude* that "Germany is divided as never before, but Denmark remains. It has perfected itself...!"

⁵ All of this is undergoing significant modifications in the post-Unification and post-Cold War era, witness e.g. Søren, 1993, and Hedetoft, 1995.

contemporary dualisms, ambiguities, and inconsistencies, riven between power and identity, between leadership and insignificance, and between different medicaments for these predicaments. In this paper, I want to look at some of these briefly, mainly focussing on what has happened to the problem of German identity since Unification. (To clarify: I shall limit my remarks to elite perceptions and formulations of German identity with respect to European integration. This means that e.g. the much-vexed question of East and West German identity constructions, 'innere Einheit' etc., will be less central. This focus further implies that the proper term for what I shall address is German "state identity" rather than "national identity"; at least it is "national identity" in the perspective of elite discourse and interests. ⁶⁾

III

It is a well-known fact that not least in the arena of national identity, contemporary Germany has been preoccupied with the *problem of its abnormality*.⁷ Hence, "normalization" has gradually turned into a political and cultural icon in the discourse on German identity--a respectable goal to be pursued on a historical backcloth typified by the ignominious results of the German "Sonderweg" and the widely accepted contemporary context of "European integration". In other words, Europe--in terms of both political economy, international recognition, and national identity--has, in the post-war era, played a variety of significant roles for Germany in its efforts to "normalize", especially to be recognised as a normal (read: legitimate and non-aggressive) country by the international community.

⁶For clarification of these terms, see my discussions in Hedetoft, 1995.

⁷It is worth remembering that being non-normal is usually an honorary and ... quite normal epithet of all manner of nationalisms. What else is implied by the application of "exceptionalism", to national identities, by themselves? And in IP the normality of realism is to pursue one's specific national interests in an anarchic international setting. The point in the case of Germany is that its this type of normality is a historical problem, a blemish, and hence "abnormal". Hence, the consequent search for and discourse about a return to "normality" is a case of blatant national anomie.

It is less well known--certainly it is not something that has preoccupied a lot of scholars-- that this very road towards normality contains features that are pretty abnormal and would qualify for the use of the term "Sonderweg" in a new setting. This applies both when measured against the background of orthodox nation-state objectives and identity formulations, and if gauged in the comparative and illuminating light of other EU member-states and their programmatic stances vis-a-vis the European project.

As for the former, this is obvious and well-known: Germany has for most of the post-war period suppressed most official pride in the nation and direct celebrations of national successes in favour of both open manifestations of shame and guilt about its historical legacy of nationalism and in favour of highlighting its European orientation and "identity"--which thus came to act as the official "supranational" replacement anchor for "national" satisfaction, and as the political-economic reference point for Germany's endeavour to regain international status. "Verfassungspatriotismus" ("constitutional patriotism", a term coined by Dolf Sternberger (1990) and given wide currency by Jürgen Habermas) was for a long spell the only acceptable coinage that could be used to set in motion more direct echoes of national identity and pride, but only because it was charged with rationality and deliberation, and emptied of explicitly affective, "ethnic" content. As for the latter, Germany has widely been recognized as both the most central member-state and one that at the same time is reluctant to take full advantage of its power and leadership potential: a self-subdued, "tamed" giant (Schwarz, 1985), evincing what William Paterson has called a "leadership avoidance complex" (Paterson, 1993), conscious of its historical burden and present-day responsibilities, and therefore integration-minded even in cases and situations where its interests (certainly in the short term) might have been better served by acting in ways more dictated by *Realpolitik*.

All this is at least partly true and would, as I said, make the use of the term "Sonderweg" quite apt, since it all adds up to a very specific way of interpreting and treating European integration from the position of national vindication. In the following, however, I want to suggest that these major pieces of the German mosaic can be fitted together in different way, one that is less concerned with the *costs* of this "moral" integration avenue for Germany (the benefits being "recognition" and "normalcy"), and more concerned with the flexibility and manoeuvrability it affords the country.

The most significant point is that where in Denmark and many other countries in Europe national identity and European supranationality must necessarily be somewhat at loggerheads (not necessarily in every single situations, but on the long view), in Germany elite national identity formulations and European supranationality complement each other in a rather frictionless and productive manner. In an important sense, German elite nationalism (interpreted through the prism of national interest perception) at this level is very largely identical with a pragmatic form of and discourse about a European supranationality, the two being economically, politically and morally coterminous: Germany serves its own interests and visions of itself and its future best by embedding its political actions, visions and discourses in the framework of Europe. For the same reason, Germany can come across and represent itself as a relatively insignificant, weak, dependent country, shying away from political and military leadership, paying its moral dues, making up for past sins etc., but still in very real terms being an extremely influential country with great political and economic clout.

Until Unification, this was an extremely important feature of German Europeanism, Europe acting as an identity crutch and a political-economic bolstering device for German rehabilitation and German unification at the same time. This strategy has been referred to in a number of ways, as e.g. "soft hegemony", "hegemony by stealth", "reluctant power", "civilian power", "semi-sovereignty", "Machtvergessenheit" and much more, and it is interestingly the reverse case of Denmark, where real weakness was concealed in a discourse of national strength and national sovereignty. Here, Europe was "Other"-land. In Germany, Europe was incorporated into perceptions and formulations of German nationality, and notions of interest, sovereignty and elite identity formulations converged under the protective umbrella of European integration and identity, whilst being divorced from any notion of a negatively charged "nationalism"; as already indicated, nationalism rather emerged as the official discourse of a moderate and "weltoffene" constitutional patriotism, which elided any opposition between German interests and European identity-- and to some extent still does, as evidenced in the position paper ("Grundsatzpapier") on German interests and identity in Europe produced in May 1999 by CDU leaders Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers, in which they argue that in the long run there is no contradiction between German national interests and European unity (see e.g. the summary of the paper in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, May 4, 1999). As argued above,

however, there is nothing novel about this--rather the paper formally positions itself in a Kohlian tradition prone to highlighting the Europeanness of Germany rather than the Germanness of Europe, but in a public and discursive context which is significantly different from that of the "Kohl era". (For further reflections on this *problematique* and its links to Schröder's "new normality" discourse, see below, section VII.)

IV

This should not be understood as in any way implying malignant intent, let alone a conspiratorial frame of mind among German elites. It is first of all a reflection of a real, but obviously also politically induced, coextensiveness between a German national identity which was for very long considered as inappropriate and delegitimized *per se*, and a very pragmatic version of European supranationality. It differs from some southern variants (including the French) in being more real and pragmatic in terms of both discourse and substance (intention- and well as interest-wise). Where the French version glosses over the national interest through a European "universalist" discourse, the German makes no bones about the guiding teleology: "Europa lohnt sich für uns Deutsche" (CDU, 1984)--"Europe pays off for us Germans". This is just one manifestation of a generally very open approach by the German political elite to the hoped-for effects of supranationality for German interests and to the model role of Germany for Europe, but hence also a just as real commitment to European integration and European values (see further below). This pragmatic position sometimes produces a very affective discourse of Germany's European commitment and even quite opaque political acts like the acceptance of the EMU in spite of the strength (and symbolic national import) of the Deutschmark. This is frequently explained in terms of a *quid pro quo* between Kohl and Mitterrand in the early 90s, the former gaining French concessions on political integration, the latter gaining influence on currency-related issues in an otherwise German-dominated Deutschmark zone. However, this undoubtedly valid point needs to be supplemented by other perspectives.

The first is that the European dimension has been integrated into elite thinking in Germany as long-term political and security-related interests, where the line between

what's "German" and what's "European" has to a significant extent been blurred; the second--and perhaps causally related--point is that in Germany's case we are faced with a power that is in the exceptional situation that it can actually have its cake and eat it too: whether Europe moves ahead along one or the other trajectory of integration, Germany can adapt to this, because the others have to adapt to Germany even more. Not primarily because Germany is throwing its weight around and pulling the punches of a European heavyweight, but because the economic and financial influence, the concomitant political power, and the security-related position of Germany together produce the pivotal significance of this country in the middle of Europe. This is a kind of double-bind or dual containment scenario, where the integration project, whether in a homogeneous, multi-speed, or core-country format, cannot realistically be ditched, and where Germany's role is at the center because the Euro can only work as a copycat Deutschmark (at least that is the only Euro Germany will accept; and without Germany, no Euro).⁸ On the other hand, it does not do to see such policies within the framework of realist explanation in neither the classical nor the "neo-"sense, but rather through the optic of a new syncretism between a realist substance/frame of mind and a liberal-institutionalist form: German "multilateralism" (Paterson, 1997). This is truer for Germany than for any other European country, and it rubs off on its identity perceptions, which become remarkably reflexivist, integrating images of 'the Other' into definitions of 'Self'-- even in popular configurations of national identity (Hedetoft, 1995, Part II).⁹

⁸The political means to ensure this are of course, first, the renowned convergence criteria that Germany is paradoxically falling prey to itself, and second the institutional deepening of integration that Germany is bent on furthering, including a strengthening of QMV and of the position of the large countries in the Council of Ministers. Also, as a kind of unintended consequence, Germany is now for sticking to the EMU agenda, because its failure in a situation where the expectations of financial markets have become geared to its introduction would mean a disproportionate strengthening of the Deutschmark, exacerbating Germany's economic situation as far as exports are concerned.

⁹This does not mean that the reflexivities are substantively the same among the elites and the masses, although there are areas of overlap. The most significant difference, however, is that they are more discursively and pragmatically in evidence among the elites.

V

Three salient aspects to the German teleology of Europe need to be mentioned:¹⁰ 1. The commitment to a European framework of values; 2. the reversal of the above mentioned pragmatic causality immanent in German supranationality (ie. 'We pursue German interests because that is what is best for Europe'); and 3. the elements of genuine transnational aspiration in the German pursuit of national interests.

re 1: This comes across very clearly in most German political discourse about Europe. As an example, take the following snippets from a small CDU pamphlet from 1984,¹¹ in which Chancellor Kohl tried to answer the basic question why "we should say yes to Europe" in six different ways. Where the substantive text of the pamphlet as a whole would support the national interpretation already offered, still it is encoded in a European supranationality of non-material and non-pragmatic normativity, almost a cosmological discourse which is particularly emphatic in the headers introducing the six arguments (in my translation, UH), eg. "We say yes to Europe because we have learned from history", "... because we want to reunite Germany", "...because we have made a decision in favour of democracy", "...because we want to defend freedom and democracy", "...because we want to realize welfare and social justice". This is underpinned by an existentialist rhetoric which occasionally refers to Europe as a "community of destiny" (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*), a term normally reserved for the nation, or as a "political community of values" that, in typical German interpretation, is emphatically applied to the area of political *economy*: "All member-states profit from the European Community and hence truly depend in an existential [!] fashion on the smooth functioning of the Common Market". Such a discourse, combining "profit", "functionalism", "interest", and "existentialism", is originally, possibly exclusively, German.

¹⁰For a more thorough analysis of this aspect, see my reflections in Hedetoft, 1995, Part I, Chapter VII.

¹¹ *Die europäische Union*.

re 2: This point is encapsulated in Hans-Dietrich Genscher's by now famous, but still obscure (in terms of denotation rather than connotation) reiteration of Thomas Mann's dictum, "not a German Europe, but a European Germany"; in a statement by Theo Waigel (1992), in which he proclaims that one of the advantages of the EU for Germany is that "we are exporting our model of stability to Europe!" (Waigel, 1992); and also in the following statement by Helmut Kohl on the, by then, completed process of Unification: "I am convinced that overcoming the division of Germany will be a gain not only for the Germans but for all Europeans and will decisively assist European unification" (in Krause, 1991, p. 308). This kind of argumentation blurs the line between means and end, Europe and Germany, national and supranational interests, by constructing both sides as, interchangeably, cause and effect, short-term and long-term objectives, or just as ideally coterminous: by pursuing German interests in a particular way one is, *eo ipso*, pursuing the interests and objectives of European unity; the national teleology has a higher purpose.

An argument often proffered in support of this position is that Germany is more prone to accepting a European federation than, say, Britain, because of its domestic federal structure and supposedly weak central power. Hardly a convincing argument: by the same token, Switzerland should forcefully support EU federalism. Rather, this is the discursive orchestration of a *de facto* sub-hegemonic power, whose continuity of influences, self-perception, and meaningful action reaches well beyond its immediate borders, and whose blend between pragmatic and idealist supranationality is not accidentally akin to the "soft" cosmopolitanism of Britain in the *Pax Britannica* or of US global internationalism since WW II. If what is good for "us" is good for "them", then the reverse applies as well: What serves the higher goal, also serves our national interests, and the organization of the unity of Europe must take account of "us" in no incidental way. If by "exporting our model of stability to Europe", Europe is served well, it follows that Europe has extensively been shaped in "our" image and that any strengthening of European cooperation and integration is also a strengthening of Germany. Hence the separation between a "European Germany" and a "German Europe" posits a polarity which only makes sense in the moral, normative light of a negatively charged history, but which is fictive as regards the configuration of benefits, influences and decision-making in Europe measured by the standard of German interests. This was true before Unification. It seems to be even more valid today (see the following section).

re 3: This German interest in Europe further implies that the invasion of the national interest by supranational orientations transcends such mere discourse. German moral supranationality has a serious component of political intentionality, though this may not always be directly reflected in the signs embedded in the discourse itself; rather, this discourse often constructs fictive rather than real reasons for German supranationality, or confuses means and end (eg. the pursuit of “peace” or “democratic values”). When Kohl (in Krause, 1991, p. 310) contends that “(n)ow, as before, our central objective is the political unification of Europe. (...) a United States of Europe”, and Rita Süßmuth, President of the German *Bundestag*, echoes this by arguing that “we have to give Europe a new political quality. It can no longer be a loose confederacy” (in Watson, 1992, p. 281), then this represents an important, bi-partisan (though not exhaustive) body of opinion among German political elites. For as Süßmuth goes on to argue in a no less German vein, “this is our interest. I know it may appear to many as being typically German, but (...) we want (...) a federal Europe. It is in that Europe that we want to see an effective European Parliament...” (ibid.).

To reformulate this point: The German *national* interest is in large measure *supranational* in some loosely defined sense. A “federal Europe” of sorts would guarantee a relatively greater political impact by Germany--via its political elite and suitable forms of voting and representation--on the decision-making processes in the EU institutions; would be continuously underpinned by a dominant economy and a currency “as strong and widely accepted as the German mark”; would vouchsafe both stability and security, two central factors of German post-war politics; finally, the federal character of the construction would ensure continued scope for national action (“we definitely do not seek centralism in Europe”--both statements uttered by Helmut Kohl, as cited in Krause, 1991, p. 309). Further, this would represent an avenue towards added influence in world politics without jeopardizing the classical advantages of a low-profile foreign-policy behaviour. It is hence a rational option for a nationally informed German politics of European integration--though not the only possible option. Not only would national interests be structurally subsumed under a supranational objective and an institutional form (like the relationship between national and community law now) which would guarantee the continuation of Germany’s politics of moral identity and low-key behaviour, but this moral umbrella would also effectively secure the continuation, not elimination, of German national

interests, because, as indicated, Germany is and remains the *sine qua non* of such a union, its undisputed hub, whilst the remainder of the European compact to all intents and purposes constitute the variables of dependency.

VI

This analysis of Germany's handling of its identity problems is based on the prior assumption that it brings into play a host of different paradoxes and apparent inconsistencies. One of the reflexive dualities of German identity, as mentioned earlier, is that between strength and weakness. Another is that between self-assertiveness and modesty on the international arena. The configurations as far as these are concerned would seem to have changed somewhat since Unification. Not in the sense, as predicted by many observers round 1990, that Unification would imply a radical change from appearances of weakness and modesty in the past to new realist patterns of behaviour, involving notably the shedding of German Europeanism, and making for a go-it-alone power-balance attitude amongst elites. This was certainly what many feared in Denmark and many other member-states: a return to a past dominated by a continental pre-WW I power struggle with Germany as the significant player. However, this has never been a serious option for the elites in Bonn.

Whatever changes have occurred should be understood more in terms of Germany both self-actuating--but also being pushed by others into--an identity formulation which weds Germanism to Europeanism in a way where the latter not just in terms of real power distribution, but also open recognition and public discourse becomes the dependent variable, unlike the pre-Unification era. In other words, not only do the German elites know what the country's position and power is in Europe (this they have known for quite a while), but they can now legitimately express it, also as a question of national confidence and identity. As the former Chancellor is reported to have proclaimed in late 1996: "United Germany is number one in Europe. We have about 80m people. We are the country with the strongest economy. We are particularly well organised (...) We have our pluses and minuses. But taking everything together, we will not [get into trouble] if we take our place in the [European] house. Naturally the others accept that we will need the

biggest flat" (*The Economist*, November 9, 1996). Eight years ago what he was reported (by the same journal) to have opined was the much more benign, "we are finding our national identity through our successful experience with European integration" (July 27, 1991).

It has now been found - and at least externally consolidated (internally it is quite another question): Germany wants and thinks it deserves "the biggest flat". It expects others to recognize this.¹² And it says so, particularly forcefully after the advent of the Schröder government (see further below). On that basis it is willing to pitch in and consolidate European integration - but having a European "identity" is much less talked about these days, and in any case was not a German construct from the start (but a French).

Interestingly, thus, in a very real sense the relationship between (perceptions and discourses of) weakness and strength has been turned around: it is the perception of a greater and stronger Germany with less to fear toward the east that is at the bottom of this rise in self-confident discourse, less the economic, political and military realities. Most significantly, the German economy--including the finances of the State--, hitherto the staple of Europe, has recently found itself in the doldrums. Domestically, the identity question is much more of a real problem than before 1989 (Jaraus, ed., 1997; Pinkert, ed., 1998). In this sense, we are observing a weakened Germany, but one with a more self-confident act internationally--less self-apologetic, more explicitly accepting a leadership role in Europe (though perhaps less equipped for it now?), but also one stopping short of overt chauvinism, partly because it is wary of the burden of history and the interpretation that "the Others" will put on too self-confident behaviour.

Germany still may think it is heading for a European Germany rather than a German Europe, but increasingly in the post-Cold War world it would seem that this distinction has little more than esoteric meaning. The construction and momentum of European integration is more than ever dependent on the will and interest of Germany to see itself

¹²Ironically, the article in *The Economist* from November 9, 1996, was entitled "Germany: Too Big For Its Boots?" Apparently, Germany cannot just take for granted that "the Others" recognise its natural right to the biggest flat.

within this partly supranational context, and to act accordingly. Whether this is a European harnessing of Germany or a German harnessing of Europe is really a very academic question, as long as it does not turn into a classical zero-sum game for this core player. So far, German elites are relatively (but no longer uniformly) content to interpret sovereignty, interest and identity in a European, supranational signifying context, because it still serves them well to do so, though possibly less well than earlier, and also because the domestic identity conundrum is far from solved; in this context, Europeanism still has an important cohesive role to play. By and large elites are still committed to Europe. But Kohl's decision, against powerful odds, to run for reelection in 1998; and his attempts, in 1997, to appreciate German gold reserves and to influence French spending policies, both in the name of rescuing a strong Euro, already then signalled a new elite consciousness, more receptive toward Gerhard Schröder's European scepticism and less willing to accept Kohl's strategy of "integration at any price".

VII

This is not to argue that there is any fundamental, qualitative difference between the Kohl and the Schröder governments on this score, but rather that what could be termed Germany's normalization process toward the establishment of great-power self-confidence and reformulating both its relations with the national past and its relations with the "international Other" evolved gradually under Kohl and has received a decisive impetus since the Red-Green government came into power in September of 1998. The difference lies less in the formulated end-goal and more in the--political, discursive and stylistic--means employed to achieve and plead for normality, in a situation where the "negative extraordinarity" of Germany for Germans--particularly the political class--is subsiding, where they are less willing to perceive and treat themselves as a thorn in the moral flesh of Europe, and increasingly refuse to play the game of "Wiedergutmachung" (making up for past sins) in the same repentant and self-subduing manner as hitherto. What this means is that the achievement of normality and the recognition of Germany by others as a normal country increasingly take the form of applying internationally "normal" instruments of policy and discourse, and to a lesser extent take recourse to means of exceptional modesty and self-conscious acts of "tamed" behaviour. What such a "new normality"--as Gerhard

Schröder has termed it--also implies is a reforging and re-instrumentalization of the country's links with its own, shameful, past; a new pragmatic as well as flamboyant (rather than moralizing and visionary) political style and a new political rhetoric of confident self-assertion, pivoting around the explicit and repeated articulation of legitimate national interests in the European context; and finally a greater degree of popular acceptance of such a new discursive and stylistic scenario.¹³ The transition from Kohl to Schröder thus--in broad and perhaps overly crude terms, since there is undoubtedly more continuity than breach--symbolically marks a change from "normalization by other means" to "normalization by normal means". A few examples of the latter should be cited to underpin the argument.¹⁴

The most significant reference is the heavily foregrounded discourse of "normality" and "national interest" with which the Schröder government has surrounded itself. As the Chancellor has proclaimed on several occasions, it is time for Germany to regard itself as a normal country and for others to do likewise, since "jeder EU-Partner nationale Interessen vertreten [darf], nur wir Deutschen dürfen das anscheinend nicht" (*Welt am Sonntag*, February 27, 1999)--"every EU partner may clearly defend their national interests, only we Germans apparently may not". This has been the ground tenor of Schröder's style and discourse since he assumed power, always articulated in a righteous, assertive form, and interestingly based on the unfairness and injustice perpetrated against Germany. Thus it is a moral argument for the application of the "national representation optic", where previously this was by and large rejected for precisely moral reasons (i.e. the sins of the past). But Schröder's is a moral argument with a pragmatic core: He wants--among other things--a reduction of the German contribution to the EU budget, so that

¹³ For instance, the ARD Sabine Christiansen talk-show, January 3, 1999, entitled "Kommen die Deutschen?" ("Are the Germans on the move?"), cited a poll taken on the following two questions: 1. Are you satisfied with Schröder's more confident style in Europe? 2. Should Germany have a leadership role in Europe? A large majority of the people polled--82%--responded affirmatively question no. 1, whereas 61% replied negatively to question no. 2, implying that there might still be a gap between the ambitions of German political elites and those of the people at large.

¹⁴The following examples are selective and could be supplemented with others, e.g. the citizenship debate, the debate over immigrant quotas and the details of the debate over how to reform the German "Sozialstaat".

he can put his domestic house in order and implement the “third way” between social democracy and economic liberalism (politically inspired by Tony Blair and intellectually designed by Anthony Giddens--see Giddens, 1999). This does not imply a retreat from Europe and European integration--as evidenced by the behaviour and actions of the German Government during its Presidency for the first half of 1999, where the budgetary demands were much moderated and Agenda 2000 was passed, in spite of the crisis following the resignation of the Commission.¹⁵ But it does augur a pragmatic, hard-nosed and interest-backed approach to German representation in EU matters, as contrasted with the moralizing and visionary style of Kohl for the major part of his 16 years in office.

Schröder’s “new normality” spells a pragmatic, national(ist) approach to integration, similar to that allegedly pursued by all other member-states--though the perseverance of the normality discourse, i.e the fact that the question is still thematized, indicates that “normality” is a dream not yet achieved by the German state. Further, it indicates increasing acceptance of a leadership role in international affairs, including a willingness to break with handed-down taboos of politically correct German behaviour in international matters of security--as evidenced by German actions, forms of participation, political discourse and also popular support for this new proactive line as regards the Kosovo debacle in Spring 99.¹⁶ But the “newness” of the “new normality”--despite its apparent

¹⁵See also numerous statements by Schröder, such as “Die Einbindung Deutschlands in die Europäische Union ist von zentraler Bedeutung für die deutsche Politik”--“the embeddedness of Germany within the European Union is of central importance for German policies” (*Deutschland*, 1/99, p. 11). This is more than just lip-service paid to the European idea, and when Schäuble and Lamers--in the above-cited position paper from May 99 (see section III)--try to critique the new government’s “national normality” discourse by contrasting it with their own “European” policy line, according to which there is no contradiction between European integration and the long-term interests of Germany, they are in fact erecting a strawman, for this is exactly the kind of unabashed pragmatism which also Schröder applauds. The only difference resides in the rhetorical order in which “Germany” and “Europe” appear on the agenda!

¹⁶ The apparent contradiction between this new political line and the fact that it is implemented by a Red-Green government whose major protagonists are all erstwhile pacifists and anti-Establishment reformists/revolutionaries of the 1960s and 70s has attracted widespread comment. In contrast, I want to emphasize the inherent logic of this phenomenon. Only a group of politicians with the right historical, moral and democratic credentials, known to be critical of the use of force and authoritarian rule, would have been able to carry this transition of German political discourse and action without a loss of legitimacy (“when *such* people find the reasons

emptiness of meaning and seductive rhetorical qualities--also helps to foreground another significant feature of the normalization process, i.e. that "normality" in the context of integration and globalization cannot be equated with the values and stability of traditional, nation-statist sovereignty, and calls for another political style, because the role and impact of national politics--and hence of political leadership--have undergone significant transformations.

VIII

The changeover from Bonn to Berlin, superficially, symbolizes a move from dependence, political "dwarfdom" and semi-sovereignty toward stability, confidence and national normality. In one sense--that of mentality, attitudes to German history, and political discourse--this picture makes sense. In the light of political culture and transnational processes, however, a different reality emerges.

In this context, "Bonn" (and its major contemporary proponent, Helmut Kohl) signifies welfare state, stability, peace and justice, and political as well as social consensus. From the perspective of the "Bonner Republik", things appear as controllable, bounded and ordered, firmly embedded in the framework of a European unity premised on a stable German-French axis. The longevity of Kohl's political rule and the authority that he increasingly commanded depended on this typically West German political culture and its peculiar blend of "Verfassungspatriotismus", attachment to a modernized idea of "Heimat" and a commitment to the Europeanness of German identity.

"Berlin", on the contrary, and Schröder's political style as well, are emblematic of a new phase of internationalization and globalization, one in which the nation-state is less in control of economic and political processes, where the significant actors must be located in transnational business, international and supranational organizations, NGOs, and of course in Washington DC and environs. Processes of globalization are less controllable, the welfare state somewhat of an anomaly and attachment to nationalism and political

compelling enough, they must be!").

stability slightly outmoded. Globalization basically spells flux, instability and liminality, in spite of European institutions which try to reinstate order and transparency in the context of regional integration.

In German politics, the fall of Kohl symbolizes the passing of the old, "abnormal" order, predicated on European visions and subdued international behaviour toward the outside, and on the welfare state in domestic matters. The resignation of Oscar Lafontaine, the proponent of welfare, social justice, political regulation and government intervention, in March 1999, marks the departure of the last "West German", in this ideological sense, from positions of power--history repeating itself "as farce" this time around compared with the "tragic" fall of Kohl 6 months earlier. In contrast, Schröder is a true (post)modern politician, without significant historical-moral baggage, with a pragmatic attitude to European integration, and uncommitted to traditional social-democratic ideology. Hence: "They call Schröder 'modern', because no-one knows what he stands for. He is 'pragmatic' and attentive to the wishes of private business", as the Danish daily, *Jyllandsposten*, symptomatically argued on March 14, 1999. In other words, he is a politician fit to rule in conditions of globality, permeability and flux: the "new" normality for nation-states in the contemporary world and the necessary basis for action and identity. And his political style, accordingly and intentionally,¹⁷ is almost the exact opposite of Kohl's.

Where Kohl stuck to a dignified, statesman-like style, and rarely moved outside the realm of politics proper, Schröder frequently assumes a political style more in keeping with Americanized showmanship, including appearances on TV quiz programs, at fashion shows, film festivals and gala performances in support of German AIDS foundations, as a soccer commentator on television, and a lot more. To a large extent, style and rhetoric have come to replace political content, ideology and morality in Schröder's "New Middle", making room--not for a lack of politics--but for greater political manoeuvrability, flexibility and adaptability in more "globalized" political circumstances, and, on the other

¹⁷In an interview with the periodical *Deutschland* (1/99), Schröder is asked to pinpoint the main difference between himself and Kohl, and interestingly replies "Ich glaube der Stil, mit dem ich die Regierung führe, ist modern und zeitgemäss, er ist mehr auf Dialog und Kollegialität eingerichtet"--"I believe that the style I use in governing is modern and suited to the times, it is better adapted for dialogue and interaction between colleagues" (p. 13).

hand, for a gradual departure from the moralized, self-deprecating discourse of the Kohl era in favour of a greater attention to the pragmatism of the “German interest” perspective.

Confident, pragmatic multilateralism--including a domestic “muddling-through” approach reminiscent of British politics--is now the word of the day in German politics, and political showmanship is the stylistic form that this greater national and international assertiveness assumes. Thus, the visibility of political leadership has been enhanced, whilst any (party-specific) substance or ideological legitimation of politics has been somewhat obfuscated. Schröder encapsulates a new kind of German politics less anxious than hitherto to make Germany appear as Europe’s paragon of virtue, less apprehensive of making and admitting the occasional blunder, but also more tough-minded about seeking political leadership internationally and being less path-dependent as regards adhering to a Kohlian “politics of contriteness” (exemplified well when, during the Kosovo conflict in Spring 99, Joschka Fischer at the Green Party Conference in May not just legitimated German participation in this armed stand-off by referring to the necessity of putting an end to Milosevic’s Nazi-like genocide (“No more Holocaust”!))--thus instrumentalizing the moralism of German post-war history in a new way and for a different set of political goals--but also disavowed part of his own political legacy by asserting that “I abandoned pacifism when I was 16”).

In fact, it can be argued that the Kosovo conflict came as a political godsend for the new government in its efforts to shape a new type of German political identity. On the one hand, it allowed Germany to redefine its role in international military and security-related questions by appearing to be morally in the right rather than aggressive, and furthermore to assume a clear and well-defined leadership role because of its occupancy of the European Presidency. In this sense, Schröder’s New Pragmatism was given an admixture of a New Morality, too. At the same time, the conflict helped to gloss over the problems attendant on the resignation of the Commission and the difficulties for Germany in both achieving a satisfactory solution to Agenda 2000 and in reconciling its Presidency with the government’s “we-want-our-money-back” approach to the European budgetary issue. Further, it helped the government forge a vision for a new European Security Identity, not as separate from but within the overarching structure of NATO, and supported by the USA. And finally, it probably helped consolidate the cohesion of the Red-Green

government, due to strengthening of Fischer's "Realist" wing of the Greens and because it united the government behind an international cause whose moral legitimacy was rarely in doubt (except for the last phases of the air campaign, when the final outcome looked uncertain, and the question of deploying land troops created unrest among German politicians).

It is important to stress that the normalization path of German political identity that these observations are intended to outline, though it does imply a reassessment of post-war history and its politics of memory, does not point toward any historical oblivion or a wish to deny German responsibility for World War II. In fact, the point has been made (Herf, 1998) that e.g. the Walser/Bubis debate on these issues in Fall 98 and the continuing preoccupation with the Holocaust--and how to commemorate it--in German public debates are an indication that nothing much has changed and that the Schröder Government, in spite of its rhetoric, is conducting (identity) politics as usual. However, as I see it, this is a misreading of what is happening. Rather, the gist of governmental positions on this score and of the entire identity debate in Germany as it has evolved since Fall 98 is that in political terms Germany has basically paid its moral dues and that "memory" should no longer be allowed to constitute, let alone determine *politics* to any significant degree, but should reside, *as* memory, in institutionalized forms of the past, i.e. as monuments, museums, written records, research, commemorative events¹⁸ and so forth.

On this reading, there is no attempt in all this to deny or play down the past, but rather to separate the past, as history, from the present as politics, and to reinterpret the politics of memory as the politics of a dear but now outmoded and no longer viable approach to German internationalism/Europeanism. If and when the past is politically instrumentalized (e.g. the Kosovo situation discussed above), it is so less in the spirit of contriteness than in one of political assertiveness. Kohl's last period in office started this process, and the new government is capping it. Germany is still very much in favour of Europe--on its own terms--, but its political *identity* as regards Europe is becoming quickly detached from morality issues and is being replaced by an *interest* optic which increasingly views

¹⁸Such as the commemoration of the Polish victims of National Socialism by the Bundestag on January 27, 1999. (See e.g. *Blickpunkt Bundestag*, 1/99, p.56ff.)

European integration--as well as transatlantic cooperation--in terms of political and national expediency. As indicated, this does not mean that "normalization" spells national aggrandizement, imperialism or an abandonment of the European project, only that German leaders and, it would seem, to some extent "ordinary" Germans too, will no longer tolerate having their scope of action and forms of discursive representation determined by a past that by now seems less morally constraining and hence less politically and culturally compelling. Differently put, shame has been conjured up so frequently that its effectiveness as a political instrument has been blunted and its limitations exposed.

The cost of this new line of action is the abandonment of the snugness and stability which the "tamed giant" approach, in all its abnormality, guaranteed, and conversely an acceptance of the risks and liminality that accompany, even partly constitute "normality" in conditions of economic and cultural globalization. Thus, not only is the normality that Germany is embracing not tantamount to stability or predictability, but paradoxically it is not very normal either.

IX

A final word on these developments as viewed from the perspective of the Danish elites. On the German question they have always been divided, but with a penchant toward adopting a pragmatic, cooperative position. Earlier this cooperative spirit smacked a bit of grovelling before one's master and doing his bidding. Today there is less of that, and also less internal elite divisiveness. In the 90s, Danish foreign policy has generally developed a more independent and more outwardly self-confident tack, and has tried to adopt a voice and influence for itself. This has been particularly obvious in the area of security and high politics (the Baltics, Bosnian engagements, criticism of human rights conditions in China, all-out support for the punitive action taken against Serbia in Spring 99, etc.), and also internally in Europe. Germany is no longer viewed as a threat (and hardly with apprehension), partly because German policies are very much in line with Danish interests (e.g. eastern expansion, although Germany advocates a slower tempo, consonant with deepened integration and institutional reforms), partly because, until

recently at least, Germany was still shying away from an overt leadership role in the security area where Denmark has particularly tried to project itself. On this count, however, developments since the new government took over in Fall 98 have led to a partial re-evaluation and, in a moderate degree, to fears of reawakened nationalism and a reduced European commitment in Germany. For example, the leader column of *Jyllands-Posten*, December 30, 1998, comments on the politics of the "new normality" that the political signals emerging from Bonn are substantively understandable and legitimate, but the "arrogant tone" employed gives grounds for concern, and winds up by arguing that "we have every right to expect something else and something more from Germany". The leader is entitled "German disappointments".

After Kosovo, on the other hand, this possible threat to Germany's "Others" is no longer prominent in the Danish media. If anything, the threat is seen to lie in the possible faltering of the German economic "locomotive", on which Denmark and Europe as a whole are extremely dependent, and possibly in a German-led core of countries moving ahead on a faster track and becoming consolidated as "Euro-land", in the process leaving non-participants in the Euro by the wayside. But unlike previously, this is not ascribed to any fault of Germany's, but to internal splits and indecision in Denmark--and primarily to the constraints which the Danish electorate have imposed on political decision-makers in the shape of the four opt-outs to the Maastricht Treaty (Hedetoft, 1997). Conversely, Germany's quite considerable domestic troubles are facts that, in the field of intercultural perception and national stereotypes, tend to downplay even further Danes' traditional knee-jerk fear of being dominated by a strong, reborn "Greater Germany".

Thus, though the German elites in their outward-oriented policies and discourses are behaving more confidently than previously, their real difficulties are not passing unnoticed, and both Denmark and other countries are perceiving, if not windows, at least chinks of new opportunity and manouevre in the troubles of the core country in Europe--not to mention a lesser giant to fear and weaker grounds for the nourishment of hostile stereotypes. Denmark might still in geo-cultural terms be part and parcel of the North German lowlands, but in a Europe which--despite the just-mentioned negative calculus--is not about zero-sum games but rather about

absolute gains across the board, this is no longer a mode of perception that provides a deciphering code for geo-political positions in the north.

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