

A Foreign Policy Analysis of the "German Question": Ostpolitik Revisited¹

Karl Cordell, University of Plymouth
Stefan Wolff, University of Nottingham

Abstract

Taking a constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis and using German policy vis-à-vis Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic as an example, we examine Ostpolitik since the 1960s as a case of a norm-driven foreign policy. We argue that the content of Ostpolitik, including changes over time, can be explained by reference to a prevailing norm consensus in Germany about the country's foreign policy towards Central and Eastern Europe, which began to develop in the 1960s.

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1. Introduction

During his historic visit to Warsaw in December 1970 for the signing of the second of the so-called Ostverträge,² German Chancellor Willy Brandt undertook a momentous and unprecedented gesture. During a commemorative act for the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April/May 1943, he fell to his knees in an act of apology for German atrocities committed against Poland and especially Polish Jews during the Second World War. Some 24 years later, In August 1994 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the (Home Army's) Warsaw Uprising of August/October 1944, German President Roman Herzog similarly apologised for German actions during the war in a speech in Warsaw and expressed Germany's unconditional support for Polish accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). Another ten years later, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder further demonstrated the consistency of German policy toward Poland when he too paid respect to the heroism of those who participated in the Warsaw Uprising and to the contribution they made to liberating Europe from the Nazis.

These three events illustrate both the dramatic change in the nature of Germany's Ostpolitik from the 1960s onwards and its continuity since then and into the post-Cold War era. Against this background, this article explores the main determinants of the making and implementation of Ostpolitik in relation to two of Germany's eastern neighbours—Poland and the Czech Republic. Our main aim is to show the basic continuity of German Ostpolitik since the late 1960s and to explain it in terms of the development of, and adherence to a set of norms to which the overwhelming majority of the German political class and public subscribes.³ This is not to say that Ostpolitik has not been affected by changes in the wider political environment that have occurred since the late 1960s. Rather, our point is that German Ostpolitik priorities—peace, reconciliation and 'change through rapprochement'—have remained largely constant, while the opportunities for success have at times gradually and at other times rapidly increased.

There is of course a broader historical background into which such an analysis has to be placed. In our case, this can be broadly referred to as the German question—the incompatibility between (the borders of) German territory and (the perceived size of) the German nation, and the way in which Germany and European/world powers have responded to this problem. Within this context, Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic on the one hand, and Germany, on the other, were and are confronted with a range of issues that date back to the inter-war period and the Second World War and its aftermath and that have significantly shaped their relations during and after the Cold War. These include border questions, minority rights for ethnic Germans in Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, and a whole host of legal and political issues pertaining to the expulsion of ethnic Germans from the two countries, who, after 1949, became influential political players in the two sets of bilateral relations.⁴

This complex and multi-dimensional context forms the background to our analysis and simultaneously defines its parameters. Focusing on Ostpolitik as a specific

² The first had been with the Soviet Union the preceding November.

³ In this sense, our approach falls within a broader school of thought on German foreign policy, namely that of Germany as a civilian power (cf. e.g., Harnisch and Maull 2001, Maull 2006, Tewes 2002).

⁴ For a more comprehensive analysis of the German question in general and its impact on German-Czech and German-Polish relations, cf. Wolff (2003) and Cordell and Wolff (2005a).

instance of German foreign policy, we examine the factors that determine the course of German foreign policy towards Poland and the Czech Republic. Thus, our interest in Ostpolitik is primarily in its grand design: a broadly conceived strategy of foreign policy designed to achieve peace, reconciliation, and regime change. While an analysis of this kind cannot ignore a consideration of the more mundane aspects of foreign policy, our argument that Ostpolitik is an example of German foreign policy continuity based on the persistence of, and adherence to a set of norms is much better pursued in the context of foreign policy as grand design.

The argument that we develop is that long-standing links between Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, notably events before, during, and after the Second World War and their interpretation on the part of the German political elite, have given rise to a set of norms that since the late 1960s have governed the conduct of German foreign policy in the sense of setting out the objectives of Ostpolitik and the appropriate means with which to pursue them. While this accounts for those elements of our argument that focus on the importance of German political actors and the nature and significance of bilateral relations in a wider regional and international context, it does not fully explain why a particular set of norms has governed this specific dimension of German foreign policy.

This gap can be filled by taking a constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis,⁵ which we present in the next section of this article. We then apply this framework empirically to an assessment of the development of Ostpolitik since the 1960s and to the more specific case of European integration and EU enlargement in the post-Cold War period. We end by drawing a number of conclusions about the empirical validity of our examination and its broader analytical relevance for constructivist foreign policy analysis.

2. The Constructivist Approach to the Study of Foreign Policy

Interdependence is one key feature of what many scholars refer to as the foreign policy arena in which factors located in the international, governmental and domestic contexts interact with one another and determine the course and outcome of specific foreign policies (Webber and Smith 2002: 31). This is also the case with Ostpolitik. Its governmental context remains one in which a broad norm consensus drives the shaping of priorities for this dimension of German foreign policy. The domestic context of Ostpolitik was initially determined by constraints that electoral accountability, the legal and constitutional order of a given country and the strength of particularist interests of specific pressure groups placed on the autonomy of foreign policy decision makers (cf. Webber and Smith 2002: 70ff.). Yet, as we will demonstrate below, over time a broad domestic consensus emerged that reflected that achieved in the governmental context. The international context, too, was and remains significant for the development and conduct of Ostpolitik: constraints on German sovereignty, the limitations of the Cold War order, and the dynamics of post-Cold War European integration were the main factors that shaped the opportunities, and thus the content for the pursuit of Ostpolitik over the decades. From this perspective, our analysis stresses 'the open interplay of multiple factors, domestic and international' (Hill

⁵ This also means that our approach is not one exclusively focused on discourse analysis. While this will inevitably play part in our analysis, we do not consider discourse analysis sufficient of its own as a foreign policy theory, especially as it does not fully explain policy *outcomes*. On discourse analysis as foreign policy theory, cf. Baumann (2002), Larsen (1997), Torfing (2004), Wæver (1996, 2004).

2003: 8) as 'foreign policy has its domestic sources, and domestic policy has its foreign influences' (ibid.: 31).

Since the early 1990s, constructivist international relations theory has emerged as a major third school of thought set against neorealism and neoliberalism. It derives from a metatheory of social constructivism (e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1966), that seeks to explain 'how agency and interaction produce and reproduce structures of shared knowledge over time' (Wendt 2001: 421) in the conduct of international relations. Constructivist international relations theory, therefore, is more than, and different from foreign policy theory. An important effort to create a constructivist foreign policy theory was undertaken in an essay by Henning Boekle, Volker Rittberger and Wolfgang Wagner (2001), in which they proceed from the constructivist assumption that 'actors follow a logic of appropriateness rather than a logic of consequentiality' (ibid: 105). A constructivist foreign policy theory, naturally builds on the two foundational principles of constructivist international relations theory—the claim 'that the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material...and that these structures shape actors' identities and interests, rather than just their behaviour' (Wendt 2001: 417). We share Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner's (2001: 105) assumption that 'social norms...are best suited to explain foreign policy'. This assumption does not contradict constructivist international relations theory that places significant emphasis on the fact that the objectivity of social structures 'depends on shared knowledge' (Wendt 2001: 419). Rather, it identifies one key component of shared knowledge—social norms—that are 'seen as the more influential the more they are shared among the units of a social system and the more precisely they distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour' (Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner 2001: 105). By referring to a set of widely shared norms, actors are able to choose appropriate courses of action in a given situation that are congruent with preferences defined 'in accordance with the goals that have been designated as legitimate' (Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner 2001: 107) on the basis of social norms. In other words, because social norms—accepted standards based on widely shared beliefs in a given social environment about what kind of behaviour is acceptable in a particular situation—rule out the pursuit of certain goals as illegitimate, they prescribe appropriate courses of action on the basis of value-based expectations of behaviour.⁶

The link between social norms and actual foreign policy behaviour is seen in the socialization processes that foreign policy decision makers undergo both domestically and internationally, i.e., they learn what kind of foreign policy behaviour is expected of them in the domestic and international arenas in which they have to make choices (Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner 2001: 105ff.) Against the background of our conceptualization of the German question, it is easy to see why both domestic and international social norms are relevant to a discussion of German foreign policy in general and in particular in relation to Ostpolitik as one of its distinct manifestations. Between the 1960s and the end of the Cold War, Ostpolitik could, quite easily, be interpreted within a neorealist conception of international relations theory. From this perspective, Ostpolitik can be seen as a strategy developed in response to the prevailing balance of power rather than as a result of a conscious course of action with regard to West Germany's relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, if balance-of-power

⁶ On social norms more generally, see, among others Elster (1989a and b), Hechter and Opp (2001) and contributions therein, and Fehr and Fischbacher (2004).

considerations had been the driving force behind Ostpolitik during the period between the late 1960s and the end of the Cold War, one would have had to expect a change in Ostpolitik from the early 1990s onwards. The end of the Cold War was a watershed also in the sense that it led to the "creation" of a German state that was economically and politically dominant, geo-strategically placed at the nexus between east and west, and pivotal in the success (or failure) of post-1990 rapprochement between former Cold War adversaries. Within a neorealist conception of international relations, the significant change in Germany's foreign policy arena, and especially the increase in power that it experienced following the end of the Cold War and German unification, would have inevitably led to a more assertive Ostpolitik.⁷ Instead, as we argue below, the goals of Ostpolitik remained broadly the same, as did the means by which they were pursued, precisely because of the domestic and international social norms that determine which courses of action are appropriate in the context of Ostpolitik. Thus, the constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis is much better placed than its neorealist counterpart to explain this phenomenon.

More specifically for our particular case study of German foreign policy vis-à-vis Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, we also need to consider that the three countries form a regional substructure 'in which interactions [are] more intense than at the global level' (Allen 1989: 68). This has implications for the establishment of any causal relations between norms and policy content. It means that we have to distinguish more clearly between the more general international/global level and the European/regional level when investigating relevant norms in the periods before and after the end of the Cold War. This is crucial in two ways. The end of the Cold War enabled a very different approach to European integration—from the mere rhetoric of a united Europe towards concrete opportunities to extend existing (Western) economic, political and military cooperation structure to include countries of the former Soviet bloc. In addition, to outlining the major trends and developments in the formulation and implementation of Ostpolitik since the 1960s, it is thus also appropriate to investigate whether the suggested policy continuity prevailed in the post-accession period after Poland and the Czech Republic joined NATO (in 1999) and the EU (in 2004).

In order to develop a persuasive argument about the persistence of social norms that have driven German Ostpolitik since the 1960s, however, we first need to identify the relevant social norms at the domestic and international levels. Here we can again rely on Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner (2001: 124-132), who suggest the following indicators of international and domestic social norms:

Indicators of international social norms: general international law; legal acts of international organizations; final acts of international conferences.

Indicators of domestic social norms: constitutional and legal order of a society; party programmes and election platforms; parliamentary debates; survey data.

This complexity and multi-dimensionality of the Ostpolitik policy process creates a number of conceptual and empirical problems. These include the delineation of boundaries between foreign and domestic policy, the distinction between grand

⁷ We should note at this stage that we are not concerned with a general testing of neorealist, neoliberal and constructivist theories in the case of Germany. Our analysis is limited to exploring the extent to which Ostpolitik can be explained within a constructivist framework.

foreign policy designs and the 'habitual responses to events occurring in the international environment', and the acquisition of accurate information on the foreign policy process (White 1989: 5-10).⁸ Our investigation demonstrates that the delineation of boundaries between foreign and domestic policy remains a constant challenge, especially given the specific context of our analysis: the German question is in itself a multi-dimensional phenomenon straddling both the domestic and international spheres. Yet, just as much as the German question not only bestrides these boundaries but also creates strong interdependencies between phenomena in both spheres, we found that a strict distinction between issues of foreign and domestic policy was either straightforward or unnecessary.

Similarly, our focus on Ostpolitik as grand design made it relatively easy to maintain a focus on the general trends in the development and conduct of this part of German foreign policy, even though we do substantiate our argument with concrete examples of the content of Ostpolitik, albeit related again to general trends and broad policy designs rather than the day-to-day business in the German chancellery, foreign office, and in embassies and consulates abroad.

In accordance with the norm indicators outlined above, we rely predominantly on the analysis of policy documents, party programmes and electoral platforms, parliamentary debates, and interviews with politicians and policy makers to substantiate our argument empirically. In addition, we have critically engaged with the relatively substantial body of existing secondary literature on Ostpolitik, and German foreign policy more generally, to inform our argument. Both types of sources, individually and in combination, present a rich basis of data on the norms that drive German Ostpolitik and its content. They are thus ideally suited to make an argument about the causal relations between norms and policy content, an argument that finds its theoretical justification in the constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis.

3. Empirical Analysis (I): The Ostpolitik Norm Consensus

Before we can start developing an argument about the causal relations between social norms and policy content, we need to show that the indicators of social norms identified above bear relevance for the specific study of Ostpolitik as a norm-driven element of German foreign policy, which includes specifying their content.

As far as general international law is concerned, this category primarily refers to treaties, customary international law, general principles of law, and to judicial decisions and opinions (Boekle, Rittberger and Wagner 2001: 124-127). Their relevance for our discussion is obvious. Since the early 1970s, Germany has entered into several legally binding treaties with Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic and is also bound by the obligations that derive from its membership in the United Nations. These include limitations on the use of force, plus respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states. The Federal Republic has long been an advocate of the employment of peaceful and

⁸ White (1989: 8) also includes in this list disciplinary problems of approaches favouring an International Relations or a Political Science approach, assuming that the former takes factors in the international environment as key determinants of foreign policy, whereas the latter sees those in the domestic environment as decisive. In our own approach, we consider foreign policy analysis to be distinct from both approaches, and one that usefully combines the relevant tools into an analytical framework that does not prejudice the pre-eminence of either environment, but enables the analyst to reach conclusions on a case-by-case basis in order to determine which factors are decisive.

diplomatic means for the resolution of disputes, and in particular in relation to Ostpolitik judicial decisions and opinions at domestic and European level have been significant in determining (and post hoc confirming) the appropriateness of specific courses of action. As a member of the EU, Germany is bound by legal acts of this organization that at the same time it shapes significantly. The critical role that Ostpolitik played in making the process of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) possible, and the mutually sustaining relationship that the two have had since the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference of the CSCE in 1975 indicates the significance that can be attached to this process and the principles upon which it was founded.⁹

Social norms, manifest in the German constitutional and legal order, in party programmes and election platforms of the major political parties, and in parliamentary debates and survey data are obviously relevant for our analysis, too. The German constitution, the Grundgesetz (Basic Law) of 1949, lays down key principles on the conduct of Germany's foreign policy—maintain international peace (Articles 1, 9, 24, 26) and promote European unification (Article 23).¹⁰ The latter replaced an earlier version of the same article that provided the legal mechanism to realise the constitutional imperative of achieving German unification set out in the original preamble of the Basic Law in 1949. While government policy is thus guided by clear constitutional constraints, this guidance also extends to party programmes and election platforms, and is reflected in parliamentary debates and survey data. In no instance was this clearer than in the 1972 federal elections when the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany/SPD) and its coalition partner, the liberal Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party/FDP), presented an election platform that turned the parliamentary elections of that year effectively into a referendum over the treaties that the outgoing government had concluded with the Soviet Union, Poland and the GDR.¹¹ The resounding victory achieved by the two parties, on a record turnout of 91%, indicated that a majority of the population shared the government's vision of Ostpolitik and helped to consolidate the strategy's underlying social norms (cf. Kreile 1980: 130-134). Its compatibility with the legal foundations of the German constitutional order was subsequently confirmed by the federal constitutional court when it rejected claims that these treaties were unconstitutional.

Importantly, the architects of Ostpolitik never questioned another fundamental norm with which German foreign policy had to comply—the maintenance of close and permanent ties with Western political, security and economic structures that were established from the early 1950s. The gradual development of a consensus on the value-based norms governing Ostpolitik was only possible as a double consensus on Westbindung and Ostpolitik (Erb 2003: 48, also Hahn 1975: 21ff., Lehmann 1984: 196f., Merkl 1974: 114, Rosolowski 1987: 62-64, Ruehl 1976: 130-140).

This set of circumstances also illustrates the close and dynamic relationship between domestic and international social norms. These were very clear at the international level with regard to what appropriate West German foreign policy behaviour should look like. The norms were by no means identical, but they overlapped on crucial issues, such as territorial claims and the use of force.

⁹ On the impact of these treaties on the CSCE Final Act of 1975, cf. Ruehl (1976).

¹⁰ For further details, see Pradetto (2006: 15f.)

¹¹ The treaty with the GDR was initialled eleven days before the elections.

Eventually, the success of Ostpolitik in establishing a *modus vivendi* that allowed both Westbindung and the pursuit of a policy of reconciliation, peace and regime change towards the countries of the communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe contributed to the broadening consensus on the norms that governed Ostpolitik. In other words, our argument is not that certain norms suddenly appeared and were immediately embraced by political elites and the general public, but rather that a number of factors combined during the 1960s to transform the context of German foreign policy towards the Soviet bloc. Most important among them was the overall climate of *détente* within which the German government of the day embedded its new Ostpolitik, including the reorientation of policy on German reunification. Other significant factors included the success of the integration process of expellees and refugees from Central and Eastern Europe, Germany's economic recovery (the economic miracle), reconciliation with the Western Allies and Germany's incorporation into Western economic and security cooperation structures. Against this background, Foreign Minister, and later Chancellor Willy Brandt's determined Ostpolitik diplomacy (1969-74) succeeded in reconciling West Germans to the reality of two German states and in re-establishing a *modus vivendi* with Bonn's eastern neighbours' (Wallace 1978: 40). This did not mean that German reunification ceased to be an objective of West German foreign policy, but rather that more attainable objectives were placed higher on the foreign policy agenda and in the relevant policy and public discourses (Brandt: 1967), leading to the emergence of an enduring set of social norms for the conduct of foreign policy vis-à-vis Germany's neighbours in the east.

The relationship between Germany and its eastern neighbours Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic is additionally characterised by a certain degree of "regional intensity" as the three countries form a regional substructure as discussed above. This, too, illustrates the close interrelationship between international and domestic norms. Clearly, Germany's special position in international law between 1945 and 1990 was a major factor in the limited autonomy that the country had in the conduct of its foreign policy. Yet, Ostpolitik stands out as perhaps the one policy area in which Germany exercised a degree of independence in the conduct of its international relations. The pursuit of Ostpolitik was obviously governed by German observance of what was deemed appropriate by its international partners, by gradually a domestic norm consensus, too, developed that cannot only be explained as a reflection and incorporation of international norms. Germany's attempts to come to terms with its own past and the legacy of the Nazi period, the lessons learned from the past and a sincere attempt to repair the damage done to its eastern neighbours and relations with them was an important factor in shaping Ostpolitik domestically and ensuring that the norms that underlie it continued to drive policy in this area even after the end of the Cold War and the full restoration of German sovereignty.

This principal course of Ostpolitik, as we discuss in the next two sections, has not changed with the advent of the post-Cold War era or the extension of Western security, economic and political organisations to include countries from the former Soviet Bloc because, in accordance with the constructivist outlook on foreign policy analysis, the objectives of Ostpolitik—peace, reconciliation and regime

change¹²—have remained consistent. These objectives derived from a set of norms that informed the content of Ostpolitik from the 1960s onwards, and importantly included the prevention of war, the *de facto* recognition of existing borders (with the exception of the 'inner-German' border), the promotion of liberalisation through engagement with, and incentives for, rather than pressure on countries the eastern part of Europe, and to achieve lasting reconciliation through accepting responsibility for the past, preventing its recurrence, and undoing and repairing, as far as possible, the political, social and economic damage caused by Germany during the Second World War.

4. Empirical Analysis (II): German Ostpolitik since the 1960s

Little doubt exists in the academic literature on the subject that from the 1960s onwards, a gradual reorientation of German foreign policy occurred towards a more constructive engagement with Central and Eastern Europe.¹³ The reasons for this are varied, but most significantly for our own analysis, they include the consolidation of Germany's links with the West through membership of NATO and the predecessor organizations of today's European Union, the completion of the social, political and economic integration of about 10 million refugees and expellees from Poland and Czechoslovakia, and a generational change in the German political class with younger and more pragmatic leaders rising to the top. In addition, the 1960s were a time of socio-political upheaval in the midst of growing economic prosperity in the Federal Republic and the student movement and so-called extra-parliamentary opposition contributed to an environment in which Germany's more recent past came under renewed scrutiny, including its relations with Central and Eastern Europe.

In this context and following the post-1963 general relaxation of tensions in Europe, in the Grand Coalition (between 1966 and 1969) of the Christlich-Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union—CDU/CSU, and the SPD, and then in an SPD-led coalition government (between 1969 and 1982) with the FDP, Willy Brandt and a close-knit circle of his foreign policy advisors around Brandt's close confidant Egon Bahr developed a new policy towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It proceeded from the recognition of the political and territorial status quo and the acknowledgement that this status quo could and should not be changed through force or a policy of isolation. Rather, the premise of the new Ostpolitik was that stable peace, reconciliation, and regime change in Central and Eastern Europe could only be achieved by means of rapprochement. After 20 years of secondary relations with the East, this shift in foreign policy orientation had something of a revolutionary air. In a domestic and governmental context in which fear and distrust of the East's intentions had been the order of the day for so long, rapprochement could not but meet initial significant resistance.¹⁴

Yet, both in the domestic and international contexts of Ostpolitik there were a number of factors that enabled Brandt and his team to reshape underlying social norms at home. Concluding treaties with the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany

¹² After 1990, aiding the transition process and consolidating the newly emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe replaced the objective of regime change.

¹³ See, for example, Bender (1996); Diemer and Kuhrt (1991); Geiss (1990); Gemeinsame deutsch-tschechische Historikerkommission (1996); Gutjahr (1994); Hillgruber (1989); Loth (1989); Löwenthal (1974); Roucek (1990); Sowden (1975); Steininger (1991); Korger (1991); and Miszczak (1993).

¹⁴ Merkl (1974: 117-125) has convincingly argued that some, albeit timid policy change occurred during the last Adenauer cabinet following the appointment of Gerhard Schröder as foreign minister.

and Czechoslovakia, as well as other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, became possible because of an international climate that presented a window of opportunity in the form of détente between the superpowers. The initiative was further strengthened because as of November 1972 the SPD/FDP coalition had a secure parliamentary majority, and in view of the bilateral context in which coalitions of interest emerged that were able to respond positively to the opportunities that arose. In the case of the German-Czechoslovak treaty of 1973, it was also, and perhaps primarily, Soviet pressure put on the Czech communist regime that made a successful conclusion of the negotiations possible. At the same time, President Nixon's policy of détente with the East in the early 1970s also proved a considerable asset to the SPD/FDP government. Despite initial reservations concerning Brandt and especially Bahr's ultimate objectives, American pressure on the detractors of Ostpolitik made it possible that the treaties with the Soviet Union and Poland were ratified by the Bundestag in 1972 against only a small number of no-votes, albeit with significant abstentions (Merkl 1974: 171f., Kreile 1980: 132). These treaties specifically addressed the sensitive issue of borders, confirming that the German government of the day respected the territorial status quo. In both treaties, the signatory states assured one another of respect for each other's territorial integrity and affirmed that neither had territorial claims against the other (*Bulletin der Bundesregierung* 1970: 1815 and 1973: 1631).

In turn, the success of the new Ostpolitik had a profound impact on the content of social norms in the domestic context of foreign policy making. A majority of the population recognised that given the overall Cold War context, Ostpolitik was the only way forward in relations with the East. More importantly previously dominant norms that were most obviously embodied in Konrad Adenauer's Politik der Stärke (Policy of Strength) lost credibility very quickly (a process that had begun following the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961).¹⁵ Over time, they became relegated to smaller and smaller constituencies who became increasingly unimportant in electoral terms. This is not to say that the SPD's main political opponent in the domestic arena, the CDU/CSU, did not fail to keep an eye on its traditional constituency of expellees. Yet unlike in the 1950s, 'expellee issues' of either a domestic or foreign policy nature no longer dominated party platforms and election manifestos. Ostpolitik had been too successful and the norms become too deeply ingrained. Its norms had become so embedded within the overall political culture of the Federal Republic that it would neither have been worthwhile, nor possible for any mainstream party to depart from a long-established consensus. Consequently, the change in government in 1982 did not mean a return to an Adenauer-style Politik der Stärke, despite new Cold War tensions. The new CDU/CSU-FDP coalition in Bonn pursued a modified course of change through rapprochement, helped, in part, by the political and bureaucratic continuity in the German Foreign Office, which, since 1969, had been in the hands of the FDP.

While one could argue, from a neorealist perspective, that none of this suggests that German Ostpolitik was indeed norm-driven, i.e., pursued following a logic of

¹⁵ This is most evident in the 1972 elections which were fought as a *aussenpolitische Richtungswahl*, that is, an election in which the Federal Republic's relations with Central and Eastern Europe were the predominant theme and in which the Ostpolitik approach by Brandt and his allies in the FDP won out over the more traditional westward orientation and eastward hostility of the CDU/CSU.

appropriateness rather than one of consequentiality,¹⁶ the preservation of the basic direction of this specific instance of German foreign policy in the post-Cold War era suggests otherwise. A neorealist prediction, several of which were quite influential at the time, would have assumed that Germany's power gains, both relative and absolute, as a consequence of the end of bipolarity, the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and German unification would inevitably lead to a more assertive foreign policy, including in relation to its eastern neighbours. Yet, none of this occurred. To put it another way, Germany remained committed to the project of European integration and its ties to its Western partners in the various regional and international organizations in which it was a member, while at the same time continuing to abide by the norms that had governed its Ostpolitik since the 1960s.¹⁷

The important point to bear in mind in this discussion is that our argument is about the norm-driven content of Ostpolitik and the fact that the norms guiding its formulation and implementation have by-and-large remained identical since the 1960s and beyond the end of the Cold War. In other words, a change in the content of the policies that were part of Ostpolitik is not inconsistent with our argument. Policy content may have changed over time but its underlying norms have remained the same. In particular, changing dynamics in the international context, can explain this. Take the example of regime and system change in communist-ruled Europe. Always one of the guiding norms of Ostpolitik, the opportunities to help bring about transition were obviously more limited during the Cold War than they were after the collapse of communism.

Another example is the way in which successive German governments dealt with the issue of German minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic.¹⁸ During the Cold War era, there was relatively little that Germany could do about ethnic Germans in the two countries, other than try to arrange for as many as possible of them being allowed to leave their country of residence. This policy was only of limited success, though. From 1950 to 1985, the average number of ethnic Germans emigrating annually to the Federal Republic remained steadily under 40,000. There were isolated peaks in this pattern, however, in the early 1950s both Poland and Czechoslovakia 'released' a significant number of ethnic Germans who until then had been needed as specialists in the economic reconstruction process. In the mid-to late-1970s, the combined effects of bilateral treaties signed with Germany (neither of which mentioned ethnic German minorities) and the conclusion of the Helsinki Final Act led to some relaxation of emigration policies. The big shift, however, came from the late 1980s onwards, when a mass exodus of ethnic Germans from the still existing East Bloc began, including over one million from Poland, as well as a smaller number from Czechoslovakia (in light of there being far fewer Germans left there in the wake of the expulsions carried out in the aftermath of World War II). While the Cold War period offered few, if any, opportunities for German governments to engage their

¹⁶ Constructivists could, of course, make an argument that the very fact that Ostpolitik was initiated bears witness to the fact that German foreign policy in this instance was guided by a normative conviction that peace, reconciliation and regime change were the necessary and normatively justifiable goals of German foreign policy vis-à-vis Central and Eastern Europe because of the country's moral obligations towards its neighbours. In other words, the realist perspective falls short in explaining why Ostpolitik was initiated, even though it can explain its timing.

¹⁷ For one of the very few German advocates of a necessary realist turn in German foreign policy, see Schwarz (1994) and on the debate generally, Phillips (2000: 23-30).

¹⁸ More detailed accounts of this particular element of Ostpolitik can be found in Cordell and Wolff (2005b); Urban (2000); Wolff (2006)

Czech and Polish counterparts on the minority issue, the period after 1990 was fundamentally different in that remaining ethnic German minorities, rather than being viewed as a potential obstacle to the successful pursuit of Ostpolitik, became one of its primary instrument. Minority provisions featured prominently in the post-1990 treaties, concluded between Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia that legalised and regulated German governmental support for them. Moreover, financial and other support made available to them was carefully targeted at the geographic areas in which ethnic Germans lived alongside Poles and Czechs, and thus benefited all residents, rather than the ethnic Germans alone. In addition, the more proactive engagement with German minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic (as well as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe) opened up opportunities for the expellees to play a more constructive role than in the past in the Ostpolitik process.

The German government concluded that national minorities could play a crucial part in the pursuit of Ostpolitik as they were in a position to bridge existing cultural gaps (*Bundestagsdrucksache* 13/10845: *Bundesministerium des Innern [BMI] Pressemitteilung*: 18 May 1999 and *BMI-Pressemitteilung*: 14 June 1999). The federal government sought to create partnerships with the Central and East European host-states and the German minorities living there that, on the basis of international treaties and bilateral agreements, would promote the government's 'overall foreign policy concept of a European peace policy of reconciliation, understanding, and co-operation.' (*Bundestagsdrucksache*: 13/3195). Importantly, they sought to draw the expellee organisations in to this process. In so doing the government hoped that constructive engagement on the part of the expellee organisations would insert a dose of realism into their policies and simultaneously demonstrate to Czechs and Poles, that the expellee organisations were not armed to the teeth, and ready to invade (Rossmann 2004). Contrary to fears among the expellee organisations and ethnic Germans in Poland and the Czech Republic, the red-green coalition that came into power in 1998, continued to use these programmes as an important instrument of a foreign policy aimed at 'the peaceful and tolerant coexistence of various national groups' in states that host German minorities (*BMI-Pressemitteilung*: 2 July 1999 and *BMI-Pressemitteilung*: 21 October 1999). Successive German governments, thus, held the opinion that cultural, social, and economic measures to support German minorities, although primarily 'aimed at an improvement of the living conditions of ethnic Germans in their host-countries,' would benefit whole regions and their populations' independent of their ethnic origin. Inter-ethnic harmony and economic prosperity would be promoted while the emerging democratic political structures would be strengthened (*Bundestagsdrucksache*: 13/3428 and *Bundestagsdrucksache*: 13/1116).

Far from prescribing a rigid set of policies, thus, the norms underlying Ostpolitik allowed successive German governments a significant degree of flexibility in terms of policy content. The kind of support afforded ethnic Germans in Poland and the Czech Republic after 1990 would have undermined Ostpolitik objectives during the Cold War. Aware of the plight of ethnic Germans in both countries, federal governments of the day worked for a liberalisation of emigration regimes which was perceived as less threatening to the communist regimes than any problematisation of their minority policies. After 1990, emigration was easier, but so was German government support for remaining ethnic Germans. In fact, providing incentives for ethnic Germans to remain in Poland and the Czech Republic not only served to alleviate immigration pressure in Germany, it was also fully consistent with Ostpolitik's objective of reconciliation as it allowed all sides to tackle their common past and overcome its difficult legacy (*Bundestagsdrucksache*: 13/3428).

5. Empirical Analysis (III): The 'Return to Europe' and Its Consequences

The end of the Cold War initiated a period of liberalisation and democratisation in the former communist bloc that opened up the opportunities for the different content of German Ostpolitik illustrated in the preceding section. Despite the changes in the general political and social context that the regime changes in Central and Eastern Europe entailed, the priorities for Ostpolitik and its underlying norms remained by and large the same in the years following the end of the Cold War. The collapse of communism around 1989/90, however, also fundamentally changed the opportunities for extending Western institutions of security, political and economic cooperation to countries previously behind the Iron Curtain. The accession to NATO and the EU by most of these countries, including Poland and the Czech Republic, could have spelt the end of Germany's Ostpolitik in the sense that the consolidation of democracy there could have been seen as the culmination and successful conclusion of a four-decade long policy venture. Yet, while this is true for Ostpolitik's objectives of peace and regime change, reconciliation did not automatically and self-evidently follow the process of accession. As a consequence, Ostpolitik, and the norms underlying it, remain an important element of German foreign policy vis-à-vis the two countries under consideration, as we will demonstrate in this final part of our empirical analysis.¹⁹

Poland and the Czech Republic became members of NATO in 1999. The importance of this event cannot be understated for either country. For the Czech Republic, it signified not only that it was allied to Germany but also that they had achieved a kind of equality at a political and military level (Kovanic 2004). For the Poles, an important psychological barrier, i.e., entering into permanent military alliance with (a united) Germany, was overcome (Tomala 2004). In neither case did NATO accession stir up emotions concerning the past. Membership of this organization was above all a question of collective security, which for the first time since the advent of the nation-state resulted in Germans, Czechs and Poles becoming allied with one another (Meckel 2004). NATO membership and the American guarantee was therefore seen as a means of guaranteeing peace in Europe and offering protection from further (Russian or German) aggression (Žák 2004). Although a common political framework had been enjoined, residual questions arising from World War II simply did not enter into anybody's equation (Handl 2004, Schröter 2004).

Matters were much different in the case of EU accession. Rather than becoming members of a political and military alliance, negotiating entry into the EU meant determining the terms under which the two countries could join a value community with very strong legal foundations (Posselt 2003). This implied implementing the vast body of existing regulations and laws known as the acquis communautaire but also subscription to the values and principles upon which the EU and its various predecessors had been founded. Crucial among these were some of the very norms that came to guide Ostpolitik in the 1960s in an attempt to replicate the ensuing success of Franco-German understanding and reconciliation.

How did EU enlargement fit into the broader framework of German Ostpolitik? Following Hyde-Price (2000: 182-183), Germany's commitment to EU enlargement derives from four key factors. First, there is the desire to ensure

¹⁹ Ostpolitik, of course, also remains relevant in Germany's relations with Russia and other successor states of the Soviet Union that did not join NATO and the EU.

stability along its own eastern frontier. Provided that membership brings the expected economic benefits, migratory flows from the Czech Republic and more especially Poland should be kept to a minimum. Within this context, political stability should also be secured. Second, it is believed that enlargement will bring substantial economic benefits to Germany itself by facilitating trade and investment. Third, by embedding its bilateral relations with these East-Central European countries within the overall framework of the EU, Germany hopes to dispel fears that it seeks to re-create a German-led Mitteleuropa. Finally, there has long been widespread agreement within Germany that EU membership has been beneficial to all member-states. Therefore, Czech and Polish accession was supported in full, as it was seen as being virtuous in itself.

This, of course, is a realist perspective offering primarily an account of the rationality of EU enlargement that is informed by cost-benefit calculations in terms of national (political, economic and security) interests. That such an assessment of the driving forces behind German support for enlargement is a valid assessment, however, does not mean that it is comprehensive, nor, in fact, that it offers an adequate explanation of its fundamental causes. While it is difficult to establish with absolute certainty what these fundamental causes were, a constructivist approach contributes a complementary perspective in which EU enlargement is the logical continuation of Ostpolitik providing it with the means to fulfil its core objectives of peace, reconciliation and (securing the permanence of) regime change, while emphasising that there maybe a continued need for an Ostpolitik focused on reconciliation, at least for the foreseeable future.

From such a realist perspective, Germany's strategy for securing national political, economic and security interests after 1989 could have been achieved by means other than EU enlargement. NATO membership of Poland and the Czech Republic (a reality as of 1999) provided for improved military security. Bilateral treaties (in place as early as 1990) offered quite comprehensive ways and means of addressing some of the residual issues of the past, including the borders and minorities. Foreign direct investment from Germany into Poland and the Czech Republic also occurred long before EU accession was even seen as a realistic possibility. Yet, in many ways it was clear to German policy makers that the desire of Poland and the Czech Republic to become EU members presented a unique opportunity for Germany to assure the permanence of political and economic reforms in the two neighbouring countries that were seen as the best guarantee to ensure a constructive approach to the very sensitive issues that remained in relations with the two countries (Heimsoeth 2002). The very fact that the German government found this important, that no significant public counter-discourse emerged, and that large, albeit not all, sections of the expellee community were included in the implementation of this policy testifies to the fact that German post-1989 policy vis-à-vis Poland and the Czech Republic was indeed a continuation of Ostpolitik. In short, it remained within the parameters of what was deemed appropriate according to persisting norms of German foreign policy conduct.²⁰

Importantly for our analysis, a norm consensus also prevailed in the German governmental context that bridged party-political divides. From 1990 onwards, former CDU chancellor Helmut Kohl saw the collapse of communism not simply as an opportunity to unite Germany, but also to promote the eastward enlargement

²⁰ For a contrary, purely interest-based assessment, see Hofhansel (2005: chapter 6).

of the EU (Ingram & Ingram 2002: 55). In fact, in the case of Poland, Kohl attempted to develop a strategy that sought to replicate post-1949 Franco-German rapprochement and incorporate Poland within the Franco-German axis through the creation of the 'Weimar Triangle' of regional co-operation (Ingram & Ingram 2002: 59). The overall strategy was designed to ensure that were countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic would be able to accede to the EU, then membership could and should offer a resolution to most if not all of the residual issues arising from World War Two. After all, the EU operates on the principle of shared sovereignty, regional co-operation, the malleability of borders and the freedom of movement. Yet equally importantly, the EU is a community of shared values and norms, and membership in it effectively requires subscribing to these norms and values.

The Red-Green government that succeeded Kohl's CDU/CSU-FDP coalition in 1998 also made it clear that it regarded eastward enlargement as necessary in order to right historical injustice and promote harmony, growth and stability throughout Europe. They also left no doubt for the Bund der Vertriebenen (Union of Expellees/BdV), and to the Czech and Polish governments, that Berlin would not support demands that expellees be compensated by Warsaw and Prague or that they be given special privileges with regard to re-settlement in their former homes. For conservative opponents of the Red-Green coalition, this attitude masked a general apathy toward issues that are regarded as inconvenient irritants in the task of creating a united Europe (Rossmann 2004). Such comments notwithstanding, Berlin also made it clear that, once the transition periods have been completed, all EU citizens must be allowed to exercise their rights as such, regardless of where they were born.

The continuity in norm consensus among the German polity can be further illustrated by the policies pursued by the CDU/CSU-SPD Grand Coalition that came into power in the autumn of 2005. Despite occasional anxieties emanating from Prague concerning attitudes on the part of some expellee activists, Berlin has continued to articulate policies that are completely consistent with those established in the late 1960s. This is also true with regard to Poland despite the presence of a right-of-centre government in Warsaw that has railed against a variety of issues, including Germany's relations with Russia, special electoral provision for ethnic minorities in Poland, which in effect means the German minority,²¹ and an exhibition in Berlin mounted by the expellee organisations illustrating the fate of ethnic Germans throughout Eastern Europe in the last months of World War Two and its aftermath. It has even demanded the extradition of German satirists who have caricatured the Polish prime minister and his twin brother, the president. What is of real interest is not that the German government has not been swayed by Warsaw's hyper-sensitivity. Rather, it is important to note that German public opinion has been undisturbed by these incidents, and there has been no marked deterioration in perceptions of 'the Other'. This in turn indicates that the norm consensus established from the late 1960s has in fact percolated through to a majority of society in Germany and remains largely independent of actions and reactions in Poland (or for that matter, the Czech Republic²²).

²¹ The German minority in Poland is the only such group that is a major actor at regional level and also has representation in the national parliament.

²² Similar irritations in Czech-German relations occurred in the late 1990s but did not lead to any significant change in German policy towards the Czech Republic (cf. Tampke 2002, Wolff 2002).

6. Conclusion

In this article, we applied a constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis to the specific case of German Ostpolitik and exemplified our argument with reference to German-Polish and German-Czech relations.

Empirically, we have demonstrated how German Ostpolitik, and in particular Germany's relations with Poland and the Czech Republic over the past decades, can be explained within a constructivist framework of foreign policy analysis, and more usefully so than within a neorealist framework. The constructivist perspective allowed us to account for both consistency in German foreign policy objectives and difference in its content over time. By identifying the social norms in the international and domestic context of German Ostpolitik formulation and implementation, we were able to demonstrate how a prevailing norm consensus has driven this element of German foreign policy and has been largely independent of structural changes in the international system that increased Germany's power after the end of the Cold War. Establishing the causal relationship between norms and policy provided us with the opportunity to explain variation in policy content over time, chiefly the differences between Cold War and post-Cold War periods, as well as pre- and post-NATO/EU enlargement periods after the Cold War.

At an analytical level, that is, in relation to our theoretical approach, we have shown the importance of examining both domestic and international social norms, as well as their interrelationship, for an account of foreign policy making. This was partly informed by our constructivist approach to foreign policy analysis, as well as by empirical observation. In other words, foreign policy, at least in our specific case study, could only be fully explained by reference to domestic and international norms guiding, and often constraining, its conduct. This ability of our approach to accurately describe and explain policy developments over a long period of time and account for differences in policy content is a result of bringing together traditional foreign policy analysis, which is chiefly concerned with policy making, and (constructivist) international relations theory, which is more interested in explaining policy content.

Our analysis, thus, demonstrates empirically the value of the particular approach that we have chosen for the analysis of our empirical material, as well as the utility of constructivist theory for foreign policy analysis. Analytically it suggests a model for foreign policy analysis that is not necessarily confined to a constructivist view of international relations, but one that emphasises the effectiveness of a more nuanced approach to describing, explaining, and predicting policy content that takes into account domestic and international norms as driving forces of foreign policy.

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