

## **IEUSS REVIEW OF BOOKS**

**Bulmer, S. and W. E. Patterson. *German and the European Union: Europe's Reluctant Hegemon?*, Macmillan Higher Education (The European Union Series), 2018.**

This impressive work on Germany in the European Union updates and extends our knowledge of Germany's role over time and across issue areas. The book builds on previous research done by the authors that already constitute must-reads for those interested in Germany, German politics, and its role in European integration. Rather than subscribing to a single theory to test, the book takes a more eclectic approach that takes seriously the arguments on German power and hegemony, ideas, and domestic politics. The overarching theme of the book relates to the rising pragmatism of Germany's policy towards the EU. These changes can be attributed to unification as well as the generational change as those who did not grow up with the backdrop of the Cold War come of age. On the one hand, German leadership has never been more important for Europe than during the past decade, owing to the euro crisis and the migration crisis. Moreover, the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the US' increased skepticism for multilateral solutions under Trump have created an uncertain international environment for Germany and the EU. Finally, German domestic politics has shifted from the once unquestioned support for European integration to its politicization, as seen from the rise of parties like the AfD and the influence of domestic actors like the Federal Constitutional Court and Federal Bank in EU policymaking.

This is a time of flux for the EU and for German politics. Nevertheless, the insights provided will be an important reference point to understand this evolution and to identify long-standing trends versus definitive breaks with the past. The book seeks to answer two main questions (p4). The first is whether Germany has become a hegemon to Europe. The second question asks if domestic politics has helped or hindered this process. To answer

these questions, the analysis begins with domestic political forces and how they are mediated through institutions to create Germany's European policy. This contrasts with analyses based on theories of liberal intergovernmentalism or Europeanisation, particularly the role of domestic politics in driving European policy rather than the passive role it takes.

The euro crisis marked the turning point, during which Germany emerged as the 'reluctant hegemon' as the traditional Franco-German partnership's imbalance became more apparent. This allows the authors to explore various conceptions of hegemony as well as to expose how incomplete this notion is to understanding Germany. Indeed, the authors continually return to significance of domestic politics in shaping German policy, providing an important contrast to much of the literature.

Chapter 1 provides the historical context, starting with the post-World War 2 period. German occupation during the Cold War both constrained West Germany as well as provided opportunities to shape the postwar international order into one marked by developing supranational institutions that would transcend national governments, beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community. The chapter considers the politics, economics, and ideas/identity of Germany policy until unification. The significance of the Franco-German partnership and its role in achieving West Germany's objectives (international integration and unification) presents a recurring theme, and German domestic politics were broadly supportive. The chapter ends with brief references to the euro crisis and the migration crisis that began the contemporary period.

Chapter 2 explores the sources of Germany's power, focusing on politics and economics, considering how resources, ideas (particularly Ordoliberalism) and legitimacy contribute to German hegemony. Much has been made of the power of German Chancellor Angela Merkel in EU politics, which has been reinforced through the rising prominence of intergovernmental institutions like the European Council. Nevertheless, the EU's diverse membership and interests, combined with the waning power of

France, led Germany to seek other partnerships rather than a hegemonic role. Moreover, the authors cite 'significant systemic constraints' on Germany assuming the role of hegemon. In some policy areas, however, the combination of strong German resources and weak supranational institutions allowed Germany to assume a leading role, such as during the euro crisis. Germany's commitment to integration and Ordoliberalism caused rifts with southern European countries that chafed under the institutionalization of fiscal discipline in the euro area. Germany's status of reluctant hegemon is apparent in its focus on rules and process rather than outcomes and purpose.

Chapter 3 looks at Germany's domestic institutions. The main premise of the book is that these institutions are important in the mediation of German domestic political interest to the formation of its European policy. The chapter covers the German federal government (including the chancellor's office, the foreign office, the finance ministry, and the permanent representation in Brussels) and the policy coordination involved, followed by Bundestag, the Bundesrat and the Länder governments, and the Federal constitutional court. The decentralized structure of Germany at first appears antithetical to the ability of Germany to rise to the role of hegemon, but the numerous veto points in German politics provides it with numerous brakes to European integration despite its longstanding support.

Chapter 4 considers German political actors, divided into the categories of public opinion, political parties and interest groups. The chapter begins with an explanation of how German European policy went from a permissive consensus to politicization, with EU policy's growing salience to everyday life giving rise to political entrepreneurs eager to capitalize on these linkages. Germany's Basic Law prohibits referendums with few exceptions, giving political parties and interest groups an important mediation function in European policy, though this has been challenged during the past decade. During the euro crisis, public opinion constrained Germany's response; while Merkel went against public opinion at the start of the migration crisis, eventually German policy moved closer to it. The rise of the AfD (and the proliferation

of political parties more generally) has made it harder for coalition governments to form. The role of German business associations varied by sector and have been more influential in manufacturing than in services. The politicization of public opinion and party politics have had the largest impact on Germany's EU policy.

Chapter 5 provides a broad overview of German European policy, premised on the notion of the EU as a stabilizing force for democracy and peace. This includes internal policies (like the internal market, EU finances, environment, monetary union, justice and home affairs, agriculture, cohesion) and external policies (trade, enlargement, security and foreign policy). Prior to the Treaty of Lisbon, Germany participation has been marked by consistent leadership alongside France. Since then, German leadership has been mixed in environmental policy, stronger in trade, and with negative consequences in justice and home affairs.

Chapter 6 presents the first case study of monetary policy and the euro crisis. Germany already had a strong influence on the design of monetary union, guided by principles derived from Ordoliberalism that informed how to deal with the crisis. The case studies of the first Greek bailout, the design of the reformed fiscal rules, and banking union exhibit German Ordoliberal preferences, and skeptical public opinion drove Germany's reluctant leadership during the crisis as the government only wanted EU solutions to be used as a last resort. German domestic politics had an important impact on the crisis, as public opinion, the central bank and the constitutional court all acted as potential veto players to the EU response to the crisis and German interests divided. The chapter concludes by applying different notions of hegemony to the euro crisis.

Chapter 7 deals with foreign policy, an area in which Germany was particularly constrained after World War 2. West Germany was firmly embedded in multilateral institutions, but over time successive German governments would break with established patterns, including abstaining from joint ventures (Libya). Other patterns persisted after unification, like the Franco-German partnership. While not consistently strong, their shared interests

have led to resurgent episodes in which the two resume their shared mantle of leadership. In terms of its power resources, German foreign policy has been constrained by its energy dependence and weak military capacity, with Germany as a 'civilian power' (p215). German politics has also been subject to domestic politics and institutions, including the Federal Constitutional Court and a skeptical public opinion that no longer views EU adventures enthusiastically. In the wake of the Libya disaster, a review of German foreign policy revealed the disconnect between foreign experts urging more German intervention and the skeptical German public. The authors contrast the German response to the crisis in Ukraine with that of the eurozone crisis in that the former did not result in German hegemony, reluctant or otherwise. Instead, they described Germany as a 'key geopolitical leader' (p230) or 'supreme facilitator' (p231), and its relationship with France proving to be indispensable.

The final chapter provides a third case study, that of migration, along with some conclusions. The migration case is mentioned throughout the book as an important turning point in German domestic politics, and this chapter delves into how it contributed to the rise of the AfD, thereby influencing Germany's European policy by way of domestic politics. It is unclear why this would be part of a concluding chapter rather than treated as a separate chapter, as the authors refer to the three crises (Eurozone crisis, Ukraine, and foreign affairs) and contrast them to better understand German hegemony versus leadership. Germany's resources, ideas, and domestic politics made hegemony most likely in the Eurozone crisis, but even then, Germany did not have a vision, making notions of hegemony and leadership problematic.

The authors note that Germany did not seek hegemony, however, even reluctant hegemony. Moreover, the dynamics described in the book of domestic politics acting as a constraint on Germany's European policy are likely to endure for some time. While reading the book, one could easily start applying these insights to the German response to the Covid-19 crisis and its support for a strong economic response and show of solidarity. Although it presents a marked contrast to how Germany responded to the Eurozone crisis,

it was also driven by German domestic politics, and the actors analyzed by the authors (the Bundestag, the federal Constitutional Court, and public opinion) all played a role in the passage of the EU's recovery fund, for example. The book make an important contribution to understanding Germany's policy towards Europe. It is therefore required reading for students and scholars interested in European integration.

Michele Chang  
College of Europe  
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