

The German Question[†]

by Bill Cash, MP



“I have always found the word ‘Europe’ on the lips of those who wanted something from other powers which they dared not demand in their own name.” (Bismarck)

IN ORDER FULLY TO COMPREHEND the German question – of what and where is Europe? – one first has to understand Germany, her past and her ambitions. Germany is a European nation diverse and rich in its intellectual thought, artistic culture, philosophy, film and theatre, remaining proud of its traditions. Who can doubt the German contributions of Beethoven, Bach or Brahms to music, of Goethe to literature, of Kant or Nietzsche to philosophy? The German Historical Museum, which I have recently visited in Berlin is brutally candid about German history in the 20th Century, indeed more so than many would have imagined. However, as the nation continues its path of European integration, it seems important to contemplate whether our answer to the question of the fragmented German identity now sits with Thomas Mann’s (1953) dream of a ‘European Germany’ or does it reflect the old model of a German Europe? The Berlin Declaration was itself a missed opportunity to lay old ghosts to rest and to rethink Europe for the 21st Century as an association of democratic nation-states.

Germany is a European nation with an overwhelming identity crisis. Its political history is testament to such a crisis. It has been broken into little states, divorced between the Protestant and Catholic visions

of society and exacerbated by the divisions of those who have sought an Eastern orientation of anti-modernism or political romanticism and those who have strove for a Western orientation of liberalism and rationalism. By shifting through political forms of the 19th and 20th Centuries – from Customs Union to Federation to Empire to Republic to Third Reich – the German concern to achieve national identity is unavoidable. Why? Chiefly because the German nation has not really ever practised a credible political model. The Federal Republic has openly pursued a policy of federalising European states in its own image (under the banner of the European Union) – making the new ‘German Europe’ an unquestioned global superpower.

The German Question has therefore been almost entirely concerned with its national identity within a European context. The development of a German national consciousness has been said to date from the philosopher, Fichte, in his *Address to the German Nation*, expounded under the Napoleonic occupying forces of 1806. It is here – in this historical testament – that one comes to understand Germany’s freedom as chiefly comprising of freedom from an occupying power, a freedom from external political domination. Recent German history is scattered with examples of

perceived external domination, in which Germany experiences successive powers on the periphery of Europe (including France, Russia, Turkey, Sweden and the USA) as exerting control over its centre, by divide and rule. Thus, the freedom which is sought by Germany is the freedom to break out of this position and attain her power in a German Europe. This notion of freedom, resting upon a fragmented national identity, has been exercised as much today in the German vision of the European Union as it was in the early to late 19th Century.

Germany has not even established her own national identity, which remains strikingly unstable even after reunification in October 1990, let alone found a directing principle which can hold the ramshackle European Union together. On 30 March 2007 in *The Wall Street Journal*, it is made clear that Germany’s tentative economic recovery is having no impact on what was East Germany. German unemployment in the West is 8.1 per cent – in the East it is 16.5 per cent. Even when we reflect on German rule under Bismarck’s Reich of 1871-1914, again the fragmented national identity explains its spurious ethic to grow and harmonise despite its rootless historical political model. It was Bismarck’s great achievement that he sought to unite his country. When Henry Kissinger reflected

on Bismarck's rule, he termed this quest for German-led global authority a "naked power" without purpose or definition of clear strategic relationships: *"The reason German statesmen were obsessed with naked power was that, in contrast to other nation-states, Germany did not possess any integrating philosophical framework. Bismarck's Reich was not a nation-state, it was an artifice, being foremost a Greater Prussia whose principle purpose was to increase its own power. The absence of intellectual roots was the principle cause of the aimlessness of German policy. It was as if Germany had expended so much energy on achieving nationhood that it had not time to think through what purpose the new state should serve. Imperial Germany never managed to develop a concept of national interest ... the Kaiser wanted to conduct Weltpolitik (politics on a world scale) without ever defining the term or its relationship to the German national interest."* If this is true of Bismarck's Reich, which integrated the politically disparate but culturally homogenous states of Germany, how much more will it be true of the future European Union? Has the federal German Europe vision really died? It seems more likely that the vision survived in the orders of the EU Constitution and the economic foundations of the European Central Bank, neither in the interests of Germany nor of Europe and certainly not the United Kingdom.

The Germans are insistent that the unification of East with West Germany must necessarily be part of the unification of 'Europe' as a whole

Having failed so often to achieve political greatness or naked power, Germany held that its optimistic future was just around the corner. In short, the German nation craves a unified country built in tandem with a unified Europe, dominated by a German power. More recently in German history, Michael Mertes of Chancellor Kohl's Office remained insistent on the vision of German Europe: *"Western integration ... is the prerequisite of unity, and must not be the price to be paid for unity. Anyone who questions this consensus that has existed for decades is striking at the very foundations of democracy and the rule of law in Germany."*¹

In sum, the Germans are insistent that the unification of East with West Germany must necessarily be part of the unification of 'Europe' as a whole.

The problem of a German national identity resurfaced when the Weimar Republic was founded in 1919, confirming that the pre-World War II solution to the German Question lay within the vision of a German Europe. Germany felt that it had been victim of external political domination, divided by East and Western Prussia, having suffered the costs of reparations and the experience of defeat, all of which led to the feeling of suppression. With such deep institutional and political fragmentation, defeat, recession and National Socialist pledges, it was within 15 years that Hitler himself had been elected Chancellor. The Nazis, operating as pan-European racialists – fighting for a new European order – clutched at models such as the Holy Roman Empire or the concept of the *Volk*. Bizarrely, even Hitler's opponents claimed 'Europe' as their inspiration and object of future aspirations. Following the economic and political failures of Weimar, whilst staking claims in German reunification and the most brutal aspiration to rule Europe, the National Socialist option became a reality. The case for a German Europe in today's world, grounded in Germany's radical revision of EU voting procedures (through QMV) and the constitutional basis for the states of Europe, continues to be on the horizon.

It was the Federal Republic's First Chancellor (appointed 1949) who painstakingly dealt with the German national identity during the post-war crisis, whilst pushing the agenda for a strong Western and pro-Atlantic orientation. Once labelled 'the Allies Chancellor', Konrad Adenauer saw European integration as essential in solving the problem of national unification against a formidable social democratic (SPD) and minor liberal (FDB) opposition, against the wishes of East Germany but attaining the dream of an integrated German Europe. It was NATO, also created in 1949, that eventually kept the peace of West and East Germany.

During the Cold War period and after Adenauer's rule, the divorce between East and West Germany through the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 meant that further German democratic goals by the subsequent Chancellor, Willy Brandt – who aimed to bridge the gap of East and West Germans – were achieved by acquiescing to

East German requirements for subsidies. This began to put East Germany on a level playing field with West Germany, against Adenauer's previous pro-Atlanticist and integrationist reasoning. The push for levelling of East and West reached a climax when Hans-Dietrich Genscher (Foreign Minister, 1974-1992) referred to the one German nation – *"There is not a capitalist Germany and a communist Germany, there is only one German nation"* – implying a moral equivalence between East and West Germany. The achievement of Brandt's *Ostpolitik* acted as a full refutation of Adenauer's thinking, as the treaty defining relations between East and West Germany (1972) confirmed: there was an accepted legitimacy of both East and West Germany and by acquiescing to East Germany, they would be presented with the opportunity for peace in Europe. With the German Question unsolved, but the balance redressed, the rationale for creating this equilibrium had been to provide peace for Europe. It showed that the German anxieties of fragmentation and unification remained intrinsically part of its own vision of Europe. Paradoxically, de Gaulle assisted this process although he and Adenauer agreed that neither of them would allow their countries to be subsumed into a 'solus institution'.

To ensure a peaceful settlement in Europe, NATO accepted West German entry in 1955. It was also the year that the Federal Republic became sovereign. Against the backdrop of German economic and political development, the European's undemocratic institutions were developing in the political form and bureaucratic direction of Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann's European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and the European Economic Community (EEC). The EEC allowed for the creation of a customs union which would perpetuate and reiterate existing relationships with the growing Federal Republic – a strong exporter² – as the Republic sought to make rapid advances with its expansion across Europe. Modern Germany, under the guise of a common EEC policy, had pursued an integrationist path throughout the EU and established enormous headway in which much of Europe were to later become dependent on, creating leverage for its blossoming economic development.

Germany has attained huge economic power on the pillars of the European Union. First, Germany's recent strength in

European trade is worth noting – in 2006, 62.7 per cent of all German exports went to the other 25 Member States, while 63 per cent of all German imports came from the other 25 Member States.³ The context of this strength in German exports is troubled by the fact that the total EU share in global export fell from 26 per cent in 1980 to 22 per cent in 2003, and is expected to fall even further to 17 per cent by 2015. So, in sum, Germany has attained a vastly disproportionate degree of economic power within a regional bloc (the EU) that has an overall shrinking global output. After paying many of the costs for the reunification of Germany in the early 1990s,⁴ the European nations continue to suffer as Germany carefully casts its own mould within Europe.

Britain's refusal to submit to a German Europe has often come back to haunt it – the recent disputes over the EU Constitution are evidence enough

However, the end of the Cold War provided full justification for the continued German plan for a German Europe. The events of 1989-1991 spelt out the collapse of the Soviet Union and for Germany, this period ultimately meant the fall of the Berlin Wall. In this context, the national drive for German unification became possible not only because of the domestic situation but largely because it could be built upon the premise of unfettered European integration. In this anxious transitional period, such a linear process of Euro-integration seemed the best (and only) model for German politicians, promising its electorate that the new Europe would be a German one. The process of exaggerated developmental planning for new European governmental structures was clear from Germany's aggressive leadership and consensus on integration during the Strasbourg EC Summit in December 1989 and the subsequent Maastricht Conference in December 1991. With the exception of a reluctant Britain (the usual suspect), Member States accepted the German model of ever-deepening and widening establishment of Economic and Monetary Union.⁵ Germany, not unexpectedly, put her own interests first over the British debacle of the ERM. Britain's refusal to submit to a

German Europe has often come back to haunt it – the recent disputes over the EU Constitution are evidence enough.

A lifelong objective for the Europhilic German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl (between 1982-1998), who was widely credited for both German reunification and the Maastricht Treaty, had always been to establish national unification upon the pillars of European integration. It was clear from a speech that Kohl delivered in Louvain (Belgium) on 2 February 1996 that the two forms of integration were equally necessary: "*We Germans are very much aware that German unity and European integration are two sides of one and the same coin.*" In fact, one commentator has suggested that by working with his colleague Jacques Delors (President of the European Commission), Kohl had delivered "... *the most creative outburst in the history of European integration since the early days, including the completion of the internal market, the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty itself.*"⁶ So convincing and assertive were Kohl's visions and policies of a German Europe that he was later given the title 'Honorary Citizen of Europe' by the Heads of State and Government, an award previously only given to the EU's original architect, Jean Monnet.

In the post-Cold War situation, Chancellor Kohl forcefully declared that Britain's reluctance was unacceptable and if it continued with its sluggish performance, it would be forced to integrate on its own at a reduced speed. Without referring to Britain by name, the German Chancellor made clear his views on a "*Multi-speed Europe*" in the same speech in Belgium in 1996: "*The slowest ship must not be allowed to determine the speed of the convoy in the long term. If individual partners are not prepared or able to participate in certain steps towards integration, the others must not be denied the opportunity to move forward and develop increased co-operation in which all partners are welcome.*" The widely-debated prospect of a multi-speed Europe has not been treated with much seriousness in the UK since it not only created a legally-bound second-class membership for some Member States⁷ but more importantly, it forgot that one needs ships in order to have a convoy.⁸ Chancellor Kohl's aims for Europe – centralisation and political unification – were diametrically opposed to the stated aims of the British government but Maastricht sowed the path. Stuck with an experimental political model of federalised

states as a contemporary answer to the German Question, Germany hoped to bring this model to a German Europe. The flaws in German national identity which underpinned Helmut Kohl's integrationist agenda are as obvious as Angela Merkel's renewed visions for creating a German Europe under the German EU presidency (from January to June 2007).

When Germany signed *The Treaty of Nice* (2001), it knew full well that the changes to the voting rules (under Qualified Majority Voting procedures) would significantly increase its 'naked power' in Europe once again. The 'Double majority voting' procedures introduced at Nice were significantly biased toward German influence in adopting legislative proposals. When a decision is subject to QMV in the Council of Ministers, a country can demand the application of double majority voting. This meant, first, that in a 27 member EU, a proposal must gain 258/345 (74.78 per cent) of the vote, rather than 62/97 votes (71.26 per cent) before the Treaty. Secondly, and entirely new to the voting procedures, a proposal needed to be backed by 15/27 EU States, representing 65 per cent of the EU's population. Needless to say, Germany needed only to form an alliance with two other large countries – such as France or Italy – in order to exercise its political will over the landscape of Europe. The flipside of German dominance is that smaller Member States have been bulldozed by legislation which they can neither propose nor block. This is a key reason for why Ireland voted against Nice. It is also behind the reason why Poland is pushing for an entirely different voting system.⁹ The Nice Treaty provided Germany with a disproportionate amount of power in the European Parliament.

Of course, a huge obstacle has stood in the German pathway to continued European integration in recent years. When EU officials suddenly took it upon themselves to ask their respective national electorates to vote on a Europe-wide Constitution, as a measure of EU integration, they found that most of mainland Europe opposed it. Thus, in 2005, when asked to vote on a binding EU Constitution, the Dutch and French electorates declared a 'No' vote. In the two years since the rejection of the European Constitution through the Dutch and French national referendum, there has followed a "*reflection period*" (2005-2007). In this reflection period, the EU has returned to the drawing board to (re)propose a docu-

ment and found itself largely deluged by a new crisis of ratifications. So far, 16 of the 27 Member States have ratified the Constitution (and two others are almost there). This has been difficult for the German presidency and so it began to follow the lessons of its 19th Century predecessors, this time establishing an EU Constitution for the effective transnational governance of a German Europe.

What did the Germans have to say about the rejection of the Constitution? Soon after the French rejection of the proposed EU Constitution, the German Chancellor at the time, Gerhard Schröder expressed astonishingly that this was not to be the end of the debate: “*The referendum result is a blow for the constitutional process, but not the end of it.*”¹⁰ Although Germany has actively side-stepped the debate which has ensued two years after the crisis, Merkel has shown no signs of fatigue in flogging the dead horse of a German Europe, by continuing to promise a Constitution. Astonishingly, despite the French rejection of the Constitution, there has been no effective French leadership building on the ‘No’ vote.

In January 2007, Chancellor Merkel declared that it was still a part of her agenda under Germany’s EU Presidency to offer a revised push for the European Constitution: “*If Europe is to remain able to act, it needs a constitutional treaty.*”¹¹ Merkel also announced that she intended to push forward the Constitution regardless of public debate, referendums or electoral voting.¹² The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, has also made clear his criticism of holding national referendums on the European Constitution.¹³ This seems to create some important problems in Merkel’s attempt to push for an EU constitution. Merkel’s anti-referendum strategy is further complicated by the fact that the German Constitutional Court must respond to a legal challenge to the European Constitution by Peter Gauweiler of the conservative Christian Social Union, who has argued that the Parliament is not legally entitled to change the national Constitution in this manner.¹⁴ What’s more, Merkel’s desire for the Constitution, which protects a German Europe, can no longer be representative of the German people, many of whom believe that the EU and euro has not brought benefits to the country – for example, a recent poll showed that only 25 per cent of Europeans felt that life in their country had improved since joining the union.¹⁵

Many governments have largely treated Germany as simply one nation amongst many in the rotating EU presidency. Yet, in this issue, Horst Teubert warns of a country driven towards political “*hegemony and dominance*”, on the back of its EU vision. The aspirations of Germany to set up a United States of Europe have failed to be in the European Union’s interests or indeed German interests. If the framework of Europe is to be relevant in the 21st Century, to face globalisation and other challenges presented by international affairs, the assumption that Europe has to be built upon the template of the Franco–German partnership must be disentangled. The entire reason we are putting forward these proposals is because Europe is not working and thereby suffers from instability, high unemployment, a lack of economic competitiveness, troubling immigration concerns and energy dependency. The argument that the EU needs to be continued in its present form – to include the European Constitution, a Common Army, the Central Bank, QMV, a single foreign and energy policy – with Berlin at the centre of the concentric circles of Europe, can only lead to an EU dominated by Germany in partnership with France. This is in urgent need of reassessment. The original plan for a Franco–German partnership, understandably premised after 1945 upon the prevention of war, is obsolete. Furthermore, France is aware that the European Union has gone horribly wrong but has simply not found the effective leadership to represent its opposition. Another aspect of German predominance is its unique relationship with Russia which is intended to guarantee Germany its energy supply, enabled by its remission of Russian debt. Without radical change, the evolution of the EU would lead to a German Europe. The institutions and treaties reasoned under the terms of the Franco–German partnership need to be unravelled and renegotiated to support a simpler and freer association of nation states with national referendums on all existing treaties. A democratic answer to the German Question at last.

† I have recently discussed this issue in Berlin, Paris, Brussels and Prague over the last few months.

1 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 19 July 1989.

2 This still remains to be the case. As a former Special Monetary Adviser to the EU Commission and adviser to the World Bank,

Professor Wilhelm Hankel, told The European Foundation in November 2006 – since Germany is the strongest supplier of real capital in the eurozone, used to finance growing import deficits within the EMU, it is clear that the weak-currency countries of the EU need Germany more than it needs them. See: Professor Wilhelm Hankel. ‘Germany – The Banker of the EMU, but for how long?’ *The European Journal*, December/January 2007, 14(1): 18–19.

3 House of Commons Library.

4 Erik Ipsen. ‘A Debate on the Cost of United German Expense of Reunification Spills Into rest of Europe.’ *International Herald Tribune*. Wednesday 4 March 1992.

5 Thomas Kielinger. (1997). *Crossroads and Roundabouts: Junctions in German-British Relations*. Bonn/London: Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Information Office of the Federal Government, p. 214.

6 Giles Radice. (1995). *The New Germans*. London: Michael Joseph, p. 100.

7 See Bill Cash. Europe’s Future. (letter), *The Economist*, 1 March 2007, calling for a “multi-dimensional” not a “multi-speed” Europe.

8 Malcolm Rifkind in 1996, response to Helmut Kohl before UK parliament: See: Thomas Kielinger. (1997). *Crossroads and Roundabouts: Junctions in German-British Relations*. Bonn/London: Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Information Office of the Federal Government, p. 218.

9 Andrew Rettman. ‘Poland to fight for ‘square root’ law in EU Treaty.’ *EU Observer*, 29 March 2007. See: <http://euobserver.com/9/23808>

10 BBC. ‘In quotes: Europe reacts to French ‘No’, 30 May 2005. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4592415.stm>

11 Angela Merkel. ‘Message from federal Chancellor, Dr. Angela Merkel’. 1 January 2007. See: http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Press_Releases/January/0101merkel.html

12 EU Observer. ‘No big debates or referendums on EU constitution, says Merkel’, 17 January 2007. See: <http://euobserver.com/9/23290>

13 Those comments have been carefully reported by the newspapers, *Het Financieele Dagblad* and *De Volkskrant*.

14 Mark Beunderman, ‘Merkel vows to continue confidential EU constitution strategy’, *EU Observer*, 25 March 2007. See: http://euobserver.com/9/23772?rss_rk=1

15 George Parker. ‘Poll finds 44% think life worse in the EU.’ *The Financial Times*, 18 March 2007. See: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/4552740a-d5be-11db-a5c6-000b5df10621.html>

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