

## Europe's Role in World Politics Diverging Concepts in France and Germany

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### The Problem

The question what role Europe should play in world politics is both an old as well as a new one. Since its formation, the European Community (and later the European Union) has had to endure the stigma of being an economic giant and at the same time a dwarf in foreign policy. This discrepancy between great economic achievement and a more modest global political impact was repeatedly criticized by the member states themselves, especially France, even at a very early stage in the European unification process. As a reaction to the US decision on Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>/25<sup>th</sup> 1973 during the Yom Kippur War in favour of a worldwide military alert, former French Foreign Minister Michel Jobert stated that Europe had been degraded by being treated as a non-entity.<sup>1)</sup>

However, the numerous initiatives, especially the German-French ones, following this episode, which were aimed at developing Europe into a more effective actor at the international level, all failed because they were confronted by the bipolar structure of the East-West conflict. It was only with the upheaval in world politics at the beginning of the 1990s that the stage was set to allow for more freedom of action. The latter was frequently made use of by Germany and France which established joint initiatives to strengthen the European Union's capacity to act at an international level. But it was only the crisis year of 2003 which in this regard led to significant progress in European integration:

At a meeting in Berlin in September 2003, Chancellor Schröder, President Chirac, and Prime Minister Blair agreed to equip the EU with military planning and leadership capabilities – even if only in a very limited scope – in order to enable military operations without having to revert to NATO. This plan was additionally spurred on by the decision to create

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1) Michael Meimeth, *Frankreichs Entspannungspolitik der 70er Jahre: zwischen Status quo und friedlichem Wandel*, Baden-Baden 1990, 41.

a European Defence Agency. And finally, on December 12, 2003 the European Council in Brussels adopted a Common European Security Strategy – a document which aligned EU member states' security policy goals and offered a clear alternative to the US security strategy.

With the publication of the European Security Strategy in 2003,<sup>2)</sup> which since then has been regarded as the pivotal document for European security policy, in which the EU's role in the world was systematically reflected upon for the first time. The document mentions “the increasing convergence of European interests”<sup>3)</sup> as something self-evident and assigns the EU the inevitable role of a global actor. The Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy published in December 2008 declared confidently that since 2003 the EU had been playing an increasingly important role in crisis and conflict resolution<sup>4)</sup> and by “drawing on a unique range of instruments, the EU already contributes to a more secure world.”<sup>5)</sup> And the EU sets itself the concrete goal to “build human security, by reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, assisting development, and addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity.”<sup>6)</sup> Especially in this formulation, the comprehension of security which becomes apparent is one of soft power factors. Nevertheless the highly praised European Security Strategy as well as the Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy published in December 2008 raised more questions than both of these documents could answer:

It remains unclear whether this broader concept of security should merely be regarded as the least common denominator between member states, whether it is the result of a lack of resources to implement a more power based foreign policy or whether it is truly a durable consensus based upon a well-founded common security policy. In other words: Is the current foreign policy of the EU, which strongly adheres to the ideal of a civilian power,<sup>7)</sup> the result of converging fundamental convictions in foreign policy or is it rather the expression of a lacking consensus regarding the implementation of non-civilian instruments or merely – due to lacking military means – an “evasion”, resulting in a need to resort to civilian components of foreign and security policy?

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2) European Council: A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy (ESS), Brussels 2003.

3) Ibid., p. 1.

4) See Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World –, Brussels 2008, p. 1.

5) Ibid., p.2.

6) Ibid.

7) See on this topic: Kirste, Knut/Maull, Hanns W.: Zivilmacht und Rollentheorie, in: Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen, 3 (1996), No. 2, p. 283-312.

It also remains unclear whether regarding its security policies, the EU is mainly pursuing idealistic-normative goals, as described above or whether it is primarily interested in stabilising the geopolitical environment as well as securing important trade routes, which the EU participation in the Atalanta anti-piracy operation might suggest. Neither the European Security Strategy nor the Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy offer a definite answer concerning the relatedness of these two aspects.

Finally, European security policy is ultimately faced by the central question how broad the scope of participation according to the EU's own expectations should be. Is the EU a regional power with a limited claim to act within its geographical neighbourhood or would the EU like to be a global actor? Whilst the conceptual principle documents point more to the latter direction,<sup>8)</sup> the concrete foreign policy of the EU demonstrates a clear regional focus on Europe and its neighbouring regions.<sup>9)</sup> Even if one must differentiate between geographic range and the question of a more interest-led or a more normative-ideal driven foreign and security policy, there are still certain correlations between these categories. A normative-ideational foreign policy which commits itself to the concept of human security is by definition a global approach. Since from an ideational-normative position, there is no difference whether human rights are being abused in Kosovo or Cambodia. And the EU has phrased its security strategy accordingly: "A world seen as offering justice and opportunity for everyone will be more secure for the European Union and its citizens."<sup>10)</sup> On the other hand a foreign and security policy which is more focussed on (material) interests can set a stronger emphasis on specific geographical areas; however, the latest discussions about so-called asymmetrical threat scenarios and especially international terrorism have led to growing scepticism regarding the limited focus on regional security threats.

These inconsistencies, contradictions and open questions in the European Security Strategy and the following report in 2008, the apparent discrepancy between an abstract definition and real possibilities for European security policy indicates a fundamental problem: the European Union - at least in the field of foreign, security and defence policy - has (as yet) no independent actor qualities. The final authority and the competence to decide remains with the individual member states of the EU and a "common" security policy is only formed through the coordination of the individual members' preferences. Successes and failures of European security policy are not primarily the consequence of existing or non-existent structures at EU-level (although their significance may by no means be underestimated). Successes and failures of European security policy are much more dependent upon the

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8) See: Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy

9) Grevi, Giovanni/Helly, Damien/Keohane, Daniel (Eds.): European Security and Defence Policy. The First 10 Years. Paris 2009.

10) See: European Council: A Secure Europe in a Better World. I.c. p. 10

political resolves of the EU member states and therefore dependent upon the interests concerning security policy and the respective room for manoeuvre.

Therefore, taking the new world order into account, the question “what role Europe should play in world politics”, must primarily and especially be asked by the member states of the European Union themselves.

These questions however highlight another aspect, which the current discourse has neglected despite the highly-praised European Security Strategy: a true agreement on the actual goals, which an EU that is expected to act globally should pursue, something which so far is still lacking among EU members. Especially the debate between Germany and France, which according to Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy should assume a leading role in the process of identifying the goals of European foreign and security policy,<sup>11)</sup> has already suffered from the fact that the debate mostly focuses on the instruments and institutions rather than on the goals of a common European foreign, security and defence policy.

One of the questions, which is still unresolved is, whether Europe’s self-identifying process should eventually flow into a multi-polar or a cooperatively structured world order. Another question, which has to be specified is, whether Europe should act as a civilian power in international politics in the future because due to its particular situation and possibilities it is hardly suitable to fulfil the role of a traditional great power?<sup>12)</sup> Or is a stronger military backing necessary for the EU’s capacity to act as a global player as envisioned by some of the European heads of state? Since a French-German agreement is crucial for the future development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as for the creation of a real European Security and Defence Policy, a lacking agreement between Berlin and Paris in this respect could pose an insurmountable hindrance for a strong European role in world politics.

### **Multi-polar or Multilateral? Different perspectives in Germany and France**

France’s perception of how Europe’s security should be embedded in the transatlantic relations after the end of the East-West Conflict is determined by a remarkable clarity and continuity. Though French representatives continuously repeat that NATO and therefore US involvement will continue to be vital for European security in the future; however, since the

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11) Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy, Wir Europäer müssen mit einer Stimme sprechen, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, Feb. 3, 2009.

12) Hanns W. Maull, Europa als Weltmacht? Perspektiven für die gemeinsame Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik, in: Thomas Jäger u. Melanie Piepenschneider (Eds.): Europa 2000. Szenarien einer politischen Entwicklung, Opladen 1997, p. 81-95.

early 1990s Paris has been questioning the US presence in Europe, expressing the reservation that their presence may never jeopardize the development of an independent European security and defence policy.<sup>13)</sup>

Paris has explained that the goal of an independent security and defence policy was and is primarily based upon the logic of the European integration process. The Economic and Monetary Union must necessarily continue to be the torso, if in the long-run it is not complemented by a political Union - equipped with extensive competencies in security and defence policy. Accordingly, former French president Jacques Chirac stated in a speech held at the Institute of Higher National Defence Studies (IHEDN) in May 2000 that Europe could only be perceived as a community of values and as a world power, if it was prepared to defend its values and interests with military means, if need be.<sup>14)</sup> Concealed behind these words is France's vision of a multi-polar world, "in which Europe will assume its designated role which can be but outstanding."<sup>15)</sup> This approach is consciously intended as a point opposing the uni-polar world order in which the USA assumes the role of "hyperpuissance" (Hubert Védrine).

The new US security strategy which the Bush Administration formulated in September 2002 and implemented several months later against Iraq, confirmed those politically responsible in Paris in their beliefs. This strategy "which pursues a new order of world politics according to hegemonic-imperial principles"<sup>16)</sup>, was contested by Foreign Minister de Villepin's speech held at the London Institute for Strategic Studies entitled "Law, Force and Justice" in which he presents the French perspective of a new world, which "to be truly stable, this new world must be based on a number of regional poles."<sup>17)</sup>

German politics avoided such a clear and unambiguous approach for the longest time. Unlike Paris, Berlin only applies medium-term goals to initiatives that strengthen European security and defence policy or that enable the European capacity to act, as long as military action in the transatlantic context is not or not yet possible. From this perspective, strengthening European independence is seen, not as an alternative, but as an addition to NATO and US involvement in Europe. Even if the European Union should attain the capacity

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13) Further references by Michael Meimeth, *Frankreichs gewandeltes Verhältnis zur NATO – Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen?*, in: *Frankreich-Jahrbuch 1998*, ed. by Deutsch-Französisches Institut et al, Opladen 1998, p. 171-190.

14) *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 31, 2000.

15) Chirac in his speech held at the Atlantic Treaty Association on Oct. 19, 1999 in Straßburg, cited in: *Internationale Politik*, 65 (2000) 3, p. 90 (translation by the authors).

16) Werner Link, *Grundlinien der aussenpolitischen Orientierung Deutschlands*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B11/2004, p. 3-8, S.3 (translation by the authors).

17) Speech of French Foreign Minister de Villepin at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), March 27, 2003 in London: *The Alastair Buchan Lecture 2003*, p.6.

to act with military means in the near future, from a German point of view a major crisis scenario in which the EU were to act autonomously, i.e. without NATO or US support, would be inconceivable.<sup>18)</sup>

Only later on, in his speech addressing the National Assembly in Paris on November 30, 1999, still under the impressions which the Kosovo War had made, did Chancellor Gerhard Schröder welcome the French concept of “Europe-puissance” for the area of foreign, security, and defence policies.<sup>19)</sup> Whether this clear declaration could be a realpolitik-determining factor for German security policy is currently disputable; Chancellor Schröder notably stated in an interview with the magazine “Internationale Politik” that Germany, along with its partners, would commit itself to a cooperative world order [rather than a multi-polar order], which would involve, above all, a close transatlantic partnership.<sup>20)</sup> From this perspective it is easily justifiable to argue until today that Germany is prepared to accept a non-balanced USA, as long as the latter returns to multilateral politics or is prepared to integrate itself in multilateral structures. Consequently the German concept aims at a cooperative multilateralism; whether this cooperative multilateralism is realised in a uni-, bi- or multilateral international system is of secondary importance.

This clearly does not correspond with the still prevailing French vision of a multi-polar world order in which the European Union is to be transformed into a counterbalance to the United States.<sup>21)</sup> On the one hand site (from a French perspective) it is evident that such a counterbalance can only be created with the help of a strong German-French core especially considering the increasing Atlantic affinities of the new central east member states of the EU. On the other hand site, it is highly unlikely that Germany would be prepared to swing into a concept of counterbalancing the US-power and thereby to give up the European-Atlantic cooperation in favour of a distinctly European option.<sup>22)</sup>

### **Great Power or Civilian Power? Diverging models for Europe’s role in world politics**

Soon after the end of the Cold War French decision makers realized that future military operations would no longer serve a collective defence, but rather take place in the area of

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18) See further references made by Michael Meimeth in: Deutsche und französische Perspektiven einer Gemeinsamen Europäischen Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik. Offene Fragen und verdeckte Widersprüche, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B3-4/2003, p. 21-30, p. 25ff.

19) Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Dec. 1, 1999.

20) “Für eine kooperative Weltordnung“. Interview with Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, in: Internationale Politik, September 2003, p. 13-18, p. 15.

21) Bernard Guetta quoted in : John Vinocour, After the Iraq War, a New Balancing Act in U.S.-European Relations, in: International Herald Tribune, May 13, 2003.

22) See excerptst from the White Paper (Weißbuch) 2006, p. 29f.

crisis intervention. Since the publication of the French Defence White Paper 1994, security policy and prevention have primarily been interpreted militarily. This also has an impact on the comprehensive military-strategic planning which has determined French security policy since the early 1990s. Since this period French security policy has consequently orientated itself according to the demands of military crisis management. The decision in February 1996 to implement a new structure of the armed forces and to equip the French military with global power projection was the first concrete step in carrying out these plans. And in the "Loi de programmation militaire" of 2003 to 2008 a particular emphasis was set on the ability to develop an intervention force derived from all military branches which could be deployed over a considerable distance within a national (!) as well as an international framework.<sup>23)</sup>

France's active policy of stabilisation and crisis prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that it has the resolve to live up to the security and defence challenges of the global age. In the period from 2002 to 2008 no fewer than 11,000 French troops were deployed in Africa in various military missions, both national and international ones.<sup>24)</sup> The French efforts to systematically involve the European partners within the framework of the CSDP in a common Africa policy have so far only been marginally successful. France's political interests in Africa collide far too often with those of its European partners and the EU as a whole.

In contrast to France, Germany's contribution to the military crisis response within the framework of the European security and defence policy will be modest at most – despite all the efforts and declarations made by the government. On the one hand this is due to the increasing budgetary restrictions. But it is primarily due to political convictions. Over an extensive period of time those politically responsible in Germany were strictly opposed to a development and restructuring of German armed forces as the French had done it, arguing that a collective defence assumed a fundamental priority over crisis management and conflict prevention missions.

However, the September 11, 2001 attacks and the asymmetric threats in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century changed the very essence of political and military attitudes in Berlin and had a catalytic effect, speeding up plans to reform the Bundeswehr. Regarding the future duties of the Bundeswehr, the German White Paper 2006 clearly states, "International conflict prevention and crisis management, including the fight against international terrorism, are the

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23) See Michael Meimeth, *Deutsche und französische Perspektiven einer Gemeinsamen Europäischen Sicherheits- und Verteidigungspolitik*, p. 26f.

24) Michael Meimeth, *Frankreichs Stabilisierungspolitik im subsaharischen Afrika*, in: Josef Braml, Thomas Risse, Eberhard Sanschneider (Eds.), *Einsatz für den Frieden. Sicherheit und Entwicklung in Räumen begrenzter Staatlichkeit*, München 2010, p. 186-192.

tasks more likely to arise in the foreseeable future.<sup>25)</sup> This poses the next ordeal for German politics. Since Germany has declared that its territorial integrity will not be existentially threatened in the foreseeable future and “these new types of risks cannot [...] be countered by solely or predominantly using military means,”<sup>26)</sup> Germany’s role as reliable partner in NATO and the EU is used as the decisive argument to justify German involvement in collective military crisis management. In this perspective, for supporters of an unlimited German participation in collective military crisis management this issue raises the vital question of the future orientation of a unified Germany in foreign policy. However, decision makers in Germany have repeatedly underlined that such fundamental considerations concerning the deployment of German troops are not sufficient. German involvement in military missions must always be the result of extensive scrutiny on a case by case basis and should always fulfil the demands of German interests. It is no secret that these interests are also shaped by domestic constellations and conflict lines as well as by the strategic culture in Germany. For these reasons German politics will continue to commit itself to security policies which are focused upon prevention and diplomatic conflict resolution rather than military means – regardless of which political forces are in power – and notwithstanding the involvement of German troops in international missions.<sup>27)</sup> Yet, as the German contemporary historian Karl Dietrich Bracher stated a few years ago, such a position also risks the danger of “negating our European and Atlantic convictions not to pursue German unilateral actions.”<sup>28)</sup> How this apparent discrepancy between imposing national stipulations in regard to German involvement in international military missions on a case by case basis and unconditionally submitting to integrated Transatlantic and European military structures can be resolved by German politics is currently not conceivable. Until the recent developments in Afghanistan, involvement of German troops in multinational missions was influenced to a large extent by domestic considerations (especially the acceptance in the public) and not based upon military-operative necessities, which arose from the new security environment after the end of the Cold War. The impact of domestic considerations can be noticed in the kind of military missions, in which Germany was engaged as well as in the concrete contributions of German troops. In Afghanistan for instance, the extensive caveats and the framing of the military mission as a kind of development assistance – and consequently the reluctance to deploy combat troops and air support – were major obstacles for the Bundeswehr to act efficiently. This also decreased the ability to cooperate effectively with the allies in the ISAF mission. German security policy therefore potentially risk contributing to the decline of multilateral security structures, even though these are exactly what Germany so urgently needs for its

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25) White Paper 2006, p. 54.

26) *Ibid.*, p. 17

27) See: Alister Miskimmon, *Falling into Line? Kosovo and the Course of German Foreign Policy*, in: *International Affairs*, 3/2009, p. 561-573.

28) *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Aug.11, 2002.

own security. Whether the recent developments to frame the military mission in Afghanistan as war and to deploy the military means in order to the military tasks can be considered as an enduring change in German foreign and security policy, is currently difficult to assess. This would mainly depend on the question, whether Afghanistan will be considered by the Germans in the future as model for successful multilateral military cooperation or as an exceptional unintended development.

What is the significance of these German-French “uncertainties” in regard to the international self-finding process of the European Union? How are these open questions dealt with within the EU?

### **The European Union's Search for its Identity as an International Actor**

The key European documents are curiously precise and at the same time vague when it comes to identifying problems, risks, and international challenges. Precise, because the dangers and risks which Europe will be threatened by now and in the future are described extensively: horizontal and vertical proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and international terrorist networks, organised crime and drug trafficking, dramatic population growth, migration, pandemics and environmental destruction, decrease of natural resources, poverty and famine, as well as instability caused by failed or failing states. Vague, because these dangers and risks which Europe faces are not clearly determined geographically and strategically important regions are not distinguished from those less important for Europe. This contradiction between the purported ubiquity of risks and external threats and the - at most very limited - scope of existing capabilities could so far not been solved by France and Germany, mainly because of the aforementioned diverging positions in central questions concerning foreign and security policy. It is therefore inevitable that the French-German uncertainty in this area will be deferred to the European level.

A similar approach applies to the European view of the overall international structure which has developed over the past decades. On the one hand, this structure is interpreted as being multi-polar, considering the rise of China, India, and Brazil, with Europe being one of the central leading powers. On the other hand, the European Security Strategy from 2003 as well as the Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy presented in 2008 both express a clear anti-imperial philosophy,<sup>29)</sup> which clearly focuses on establishing a cooperative world order and not on a balancing of poles and potentials. What is characteristic of the international self-image of the EU is the approach that classical power and balance ideas exist alongside or even overlap with the concepts of a “world society” and “world order” based upon functioning international institutions. The different point of views in

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29) Werner Link, *Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Europa. Herausforderungen und Antworten*, Baden-Baden 2006, p. 81.

France and Germany, whether the European Union should primarily act as a great power in a multi-polar world order or as a civilian power in a cooperative-multilateral international system, is consequently reflected in the discussions at the European level. Seen from this perspective, it is hardly surprising that the European Union's responses to challenges, crisis and conflicts have so far been hardly resolute, extremely hesitant or oftentimes simply non-existent

Against this background the European Union is currently in a "progress trap": in view of the manifold global challenges there is no alternative for the European Union but to free itself from its self-inflicted inability to act – even if only on a declaratory level initially – and to pursue the path of its emancipation in world politics. At the same time the EU is tied up in a highly complex set of restrictions, resulting from diverging perceptions and world views, which have until now prevented the EU from living up to an actor with wide-reaching, international influence.

First of all, there is no enduring agreement among member states concerning the question what international role Europe or the European Union should assume in the future. The differences between France and Germany prove this. It is uncontested that both Germany and France see no alternative to multi-lateral security cooperation in Europe with a gradual transfer of sovereignty rights to EU level. Yet differences exist in the question, whether this European security cooperation aims at an "Europe puissance" acting as a great power in a multipolar world, or whether the European cooperative multilateral approach should be extended to the global level (i.e. by shaping a cooperative multilateral international architecture).

A broad consensus exists regarding the nature of the threats in foreign and security policy. The decisive factor in this context is what significance France and Germany will attach to these altered risks for their respective security interests and what the conceptional and operative consequences will be. And despite the numerous similarities between France and Germany, a great dissent can crop up here. Geographically differing security interests (e.g. Africa) and especially the incompatible evaluation of the legitimacy of the military power factor will most likely prove to be the greatest obstacles. French and German interests continue to be at odds. France and Germany are always very quick to agree in official documents that in the future Europe must present itself as a power with civilian as well as with military means in international politics; and that conflict prevention by means of active stabilizing policies and military crisis management are two fundamental pillars upon which the common European security strategy must be based. Yet Berlin and Paris have not resolved what ratio should exist between military and non-military elements in such a strategy or to be more precise, Berlin and Paris answer this question with differing priorities. In addition,

several indicators speak for the fact that especially in Germany (but recently also increasingly in France) security policies which pursue the goal of a comprehensive international stability under the influence of military instruments increasingly conflict with, “the uncontrolled permeation of foreign policy by a democratic public, which not only impedes a consistent perspective by democratic governments, it may even make it virtually impossible.”<sup>30)</sup> This public is primarily focused on domestic issues such as a maintenance or maximisation of prosperity and is generally sceptical towards a more international engagement of the EU. There is an overall danger that because of this, in the future the European Union will not be able to react to crisis or conflicts except with agonizing abstinence.

Secondly, it is worth noting that an active international role of the EU has mainly been confronted with international dismissal: this rejection stems from basically all leading states, reaching from the USA, which continues to strive for uni-polarity, to the large newly industrialized countries which are either pursuing a similar role themselves or reject the EU's claims (either to act as a global power or to establish a cooperative world order) because they are wary of an interference in their domestic affairs. Even the basic goal of regulating and codifying international relations is not consistently supported by large parts of the international community.

### **The Prospects**

Is there a way out of this progress trap for Europe? To start with, the European states have to bring in line their differing ideas and agree upon the goal their foreign and security policies should pursue. Especially France and Germany have go ahead in this respect. The European Security Strategy and the Implementation Report merely broach the issues and have the character of prescription compromises. The lack of clarity in the goals in foreign and security policy is enforced by the fact that Europe has differing perceptions of its self-image: one of the most important questions here is whether the EU wants to develop itself into one cohesive security actor or whether it wants to remain a forum for the coordination of its member states' security policies. It also remains to be determined whether the EU sees itself as a great power in the concert of powers or whether it wants to help shape a fundamental structural change of the international system with the objective to establish a world society. The same applies to the question whether Europe regards itself as a civilian power, which will only employ classic military means as a last resort. These questions are in dire need of clarification. The world therefore needs a Europe which knows what it wants and what it is prepared and capable of jointly achieving!

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30) Peter Graf Kielmansegg quoted in: Michael Meimeth, *Diskussionsbericht*, in: Hartmut Jäckel (Ed.): *Ist das Prinzip der Nichtintervention überholt?* Baden-Baden 1995 (Publication by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Politikwissenschaft, Vol. 12), p. 163-169, p. 169 (translation by the authors).

