

Conference Report

Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of German Politics (IASGP), June 16–17, 2016, Prague

On June 16–17, 2016, Prague hosted the 42nd Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of German Politics (IASGP), co-organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University and the Goethe-Institut Prague. The conference took place under the auspices of the German Ambassador to the Czech Republic, H.E. Arndt Freiherr Freytag von Loringhoven, and the Rector of Charles University, Tomáš Zima. The event attracted experts from both Europe and the United States and offered insights into several different dimensions and areas of German politics. The conference was divided into six panels and a keynote lecture sponsored by the Association's flagship journal, *German Politics*. Among the honored guests were Ambassador von Loringhoven; Charles University's Vice-Rector, Jan Konvalinka; the Director of the Goethe-Institut in Prague, Berthold Franke; and the Head of the Chair of German and Austrian Studies at Charles University, Ota Konrád.

The German Politics Lecture was delivered by Hanns W. Maull of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (*Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*), Berlin and the Mercator Institute for Contemporary China Studies. Building upon thirty years of his research in the field of Germany's foreign and European policies, Maull provided a critical reflection on the leading conceptualizations in current debate about Germany's power. Discussing Constanze Stelzenmüller's "shaping power," Hans Kundnani and Stephen Szabo's "geo-economic power," and his own work on "civilian power," Maull concluded that none of these concepts are able to capture Germany's multifaceted and changing policies. For Maull, German power is not clearly definable, but is a "highly complex, contingent, uncertain and therefore fragile phenomenon," which is being influenced by a number of factors, including the mismatch between the demand for and supply of governance, dysfunctional features of democratic systems, and the rise of populist politics. As a final provocation, Maull suggested that Germany's power has become increasingly "autistic," that is, preoccupied with itself and unable to reflect and influence its external environment.

Similar concerns arose in two other panels, making Germany's foreign and European policies two of the key themes of the conference. A panel entitled "New Directions in German Foreign Policy: Theory and Cases" offered a series of conceptually-oriented presentations, interpreting Germany's foreign policy through explicit engagement with theoretical developments in international relations and other disciplines. Alister Miskimmon (Royal Holloway, University of London) discussed the strategic narratives through which Germany demonstrates and communicates continuity and change in its foreign policy. Through narratives, actors create shared meanings of their identities and pasts, so as to shape their courses of action and influence their partners. For his part, Jakub Eberle (Charles University, Prague) criticized the current state of the literature on Germany's foreign policy, arguing that leading accounts tend to provide too-rigid concepts that are unable to capture the ambiguities and complexities of decision-making. As an alternative,

he presented a theoretical framework that emphasizes the contextual and contradictory nature of foreign policy. Patricia Daenhardt (University of Lisbon) discussed the relationship between Germany's foreign policy and the international order, arguing that Germany is ultimately a status quo power with an interest in maintaining the liberal global order. The problem, however, is that this order has been under attack, and Germany is only now slowly developing a strategic vision of how to respond to these challenges. Finally, Vladimír Handl (Charles University, Prague) provided a reading of Germany's policies towards Russia using the concept of ontological security, which focuses on the subjects' perception of themselves as coherent and unitary actors, which is reflected in and maintained through policy routines. Russia's invasion of Ukraine shattered Germany's ontological security, which is based on a view of Russia as a part of the civilized European order. Handl then tracked how different voices in the German debate made sense of the crisis and attempted to reconstruct Germany's identity in that context.

Additionally, a panel on "Germany's European Policy" brought together two very different papers, both of which, however, provided interesting and rather compatible insights into Germany's policies in the EU context. Simon Bulmer (University of Sheffield) and William Paterson (Aston University) offered a conceptual perspective on the politicization of Germany's European policy. Analyzing the country's party politics and public opinion over the last thirty years, they tracked a movement from "permissive consensus" to "constraining dissensus" with respect to European integration. They conclude that while the EU is still seen in a favorable light by the political and societal mainstream, Germany has increasingly been prone to favoring national decision-making over further Europeanization, a trend that has been accelerated by the crisis in the Eurozone. For her part, Kirstin Lindloff (TU Braunschweig) examined Germany's vehicle emission policies as compared to those of the European institutions and other member states. Challenging the image of Germany as a leader in environmental policy, she contended that the Federal Republic has only occasionally stood up in the role of pacemaker, while it often has been notably reluctant to push for stricter environmental regulation.

The second overarching theme of the conference focused on parties and elections, spanning multiple panels. Wade Jacoby (Brigham Young University) outlined a comparison of grand coalitions. In his contribution he argued for incorporating insights from Germany and Austria into political science's broader discussion of coalitions. After reviewing the different functions of grand coalitions, he offered a cautiously optimistic view of their impact on democracy. Following that, Johannes N. Blumenberg (Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz) discussed the 2016 regional election in Germany in the context of the theoretical debate about the impact of political leaders on party success. With the help of statistical methods, he produced evidence for the argument that Winfried Kretschmann's personality played a key role in the Green Party's victory in Baden-Württemberg. Michael Angenendt (Heinrich-Heine University, Düsseldorf) used a similar approach to analyze anti-party sentiment among members of German independent local lists, demonstrating much higher levels of skepticism about the role of parties on the local level than in the national context. Next, Manuela Blumenberg (Johannes Gutenberg

University, Mainz) provided a comparative statistical analysis of the amounts of party spending in the European context. Frank Bandau (Bamberg University) explained the CSU's failures with respect to Germany's federal child care subsidy and its highway toll for foreigners, with the help of a "multiple streams framework." Adam Jarosz (University of Zielona Góra) compared the formation of local governments in the post-socialist urban contexts of Rostock, Germany and Toruń, Poland. Finally, Aleksandra Kruk (University of Zielona Góra) provided a historiographical analysis of the development of the FDP's image in Poland.

Other issues discussed at the conference included a heated exchange between Joyce Mushaben (University of St. Louis-Missouri) and Lothar Funk (HS Düsseldorf) on the economic, political and moral aspects of Germany's refugee and asylum policy, and Ed Turner's (Aston University) analysis of private rented housing in Germany and Britain.

The next, 43rd annual conference of the IASGP will be held in London on May 30–31, 2017.

Jakub Eberle