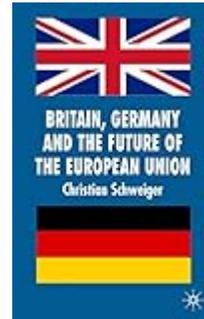




**Christian Schweiger.** *Britain, Germany, and the Future of the European Union.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. xi + 221 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-00809-0.



**Reviewed by** Alexander Reinfeldt (Historisches Seminar, Universität Hamburg)

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## Correspondence in Diversity

In the twenty-seven-member European Union (EU) today, the Franco-German couple no longer constitutes the predominant determiner in the process of European integration, as it did over long periods since the 1950s. Multiple working relationships between various member states and changing leadership constellations will determine the future process of European integration instead. This premise underlies Christian Schweiger's case study of correspondences in European policy issues between the British New Labour government under Tony Blair and the German SPD/Green party coalition under Gerhard Schröder. Schweiger regards his study as "an attempt to enrich the debate on the leadership constellation of the European Union in the twenty-first century"; in doing so, he challenges the predominant focus on the Franco-German partnership in the EU (p. ix). According to Schweiger, the issue of common ground for cooperation in the future EU between "the two most unlikely partners" (p. ix), Britain and Germany, is crucial because both countries are in the act of redefining their respective role in the EU. His argument draws on English and German sources such as official government policy statements, parliamentary speeches, com-

munications, press interviews, articles from British and German newspapers, opinion polls, and EU treaties. Additionally, to accentuate his evidence, Schweiger interviewed several British and German politicians engaged in European policymaking on the governmental and parliamentary levels. His chances of substantially assessing underlying British and German political priorities are rather scarce due to his narrow focus on published sources, though this problem was somewhat unavoidable due to the limited accessibility or closure of archives and their materials for the recent past. Even so, Schweiger gives an informative account of the political debates of European and foreign policy in Britain and Germany in recent years.

Schweiger's book is structured in five chapters. After an introduction that serves as chapter 1, chapter 2 focuses on Britain's attitude toward European integration since 1945. Chapter 3 focuses on Germany's European policy before and after reunification. Both chapters 2 and 3 are intensely descriptive; they draw on published works but do not always reflect the current state of research. Chapter 4 constitutes the core of Schweiger's

book and focuses on areas of British-German cooperation. This chapter is based on the author's case study of British and German preferences in crucial European policy areas, such as institutional and procedural reform of the EU, economic and monetary union, economic reform and social policies, foreign and security policy, and enlargement (including the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy or CAP). This chapter is the most conclusive one in Schweiger's book. The volume concludes with a discussion of the significance of British-German cooperation for the future of the EU in chapter 5.

In his discussion of developments in Britain's European and foreign policies since 1945, Schweiger attributes Britain's traditionally global (instead of European) focus and the priority given in Whitehall to free trade and economic cooperation (instead of supranational economic and political integration) to five main factors. They are: Britain's insular geography, its unoccupied and victorious status during the world wars, the unbroken tradition of the British state and its political system, relations with the former British colonies in the Commonwealth, and the special relationship with the United States. These factors influenced Britain's European policy attitudes even under the Blair administration. However, Schweiger stresses the more positive and constructive attitude of New Labour, which ratified the social protocols of the Maastricht treaty, approved the extension of qualified majority voting, participated in developing integrated European defense capabilities, accepted the necessity of a common EU foreign security policy, and showed willingness to compromise with its European partners (pp. 38-39). For Schweiger, this indicates "a certain degree of 'normalisation' of British European policy" (p. 41).

According to Schweiger, German European and foreign policy have also undergone a process of "normalisation" (p. 66). Schweiger identifies West German foreign policy features, shared by successive governments until the early 1990s, as "extensive multilateralism, role model Europeanness and a preventive civilian power approach with regard to crisis management" (p. 53). According to Schweiger, Maastricht was the "turning point" in Germany's European policy "as it marked the end of the quasi-automatic German consent to integrationist steps, even if they were considered to be unfavorable to German national interests" (p. 62). The unusually fervent domestic debate about the economic and constitutional implications of Maastricht and European Monetary Union (EMU) and the abolition of the *mark* accompanied an increasing German uneasiness about Germany's status

as the main net contributor in the EU and its previous "checkbook policy" approach to foreign affairs. Under the first SPD/Green party coalition government, the content of Germany's European policy was not fundamentally altered. However, Schweiger asserts that the newly elected Schröder emphasized German "national interests" much more vigorously than any of his predecessors had, even at the expense of openly thwarting French policies.

Another "major shift in the foreign policy of the unified Germany" and "a big step towards the normalisation of German foreign policy" was manifest in the Red-Green coalition's decision to send German troops into Kosovo (pp. 74-76). Schweiger reasons that "German European policy has definitely become more British, a metaphor for a normalisation in terms of its approach towards European integration. Gone are the days where Germany could neglect its domestic interests in order to satisfy its partners on the European stage. Germany is now as committed to the development of European integration as ever, it is simply increasingly behaving like most other European nations, which have to reconcile domestic pressures with global responsibilities" (pp. 78-79). Against this background, Schweiger strives to outline the British and German positions in the European policy areas mentioned above, consistently focusing on the Blair and Schröder governments, "to show where Britain and Germany have developed sufficient correspondences in their strategic interests to develop a working partnership in the future" (p. 82).

Considering the need for institutional and procedural reform of the EU, Schweiger considers the common ground for such a British-German working partnership to be "bigger than ever before" (pp. 114-115). Schweiger argues that both the Blair and the Schröder governments, unlike France, engaged intensely in furthering fundamental institutional and decision-making reform. According to Schweiger, discussion of these matters at the European Council in Nice revealed substantial British-German agreement and the "collapse of the Franco-German couple" (pp. 96-97). Since then, both governments have promoted dividing responsibilities in the EU based on the principle of "subsidiarity" and on the strengthened role of national parliaments in EU decision-making.

However, Schweiger also mentions the divergences. Due to "fundamentally different political cultures," British and German proposals for institutional and procedural reform differ on the transfer of sovereignty to

the supranational level, the independence of the European Commission, and the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into an EU constitution (pp. 82, 108-110). Furthermore, Schweiger considers the scope of the extension of qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council to be “the main difference between the German and British approach” to reform (p. 95). Generally in favor of using QMV, the British government is determined to preserve the principle of unanimity in “crucial red line areas” of national interest (constitutional issues and treaty changes, social security, taxes, defense, and foreign policy issues). Germany, on the other hand, favors extensive application of QMV in the Council, including to sensitive areas such as taxes, social policies, justice, and home as well as foreign and security affairs.

Schweiger stresses that Britain’s continuous absence from EMU remains a major hindrance to a British leadership role in the EU. Although the New Labour government denied constitutional barriers to British participation in EMU, it nonetheless excluded Britain from a leading role on the euro issue. Consequently, Schweiger asserts that the Schröder government considered Britain “a half-hearted European” and sought renewed cooperation with France over the adjustment of the CAP in 2002 (p. 124). Schweiger concludes that a future leadership role for Britain in the EU will require its participation in EMU.

Concerning economic reform and social policies, Schweiger also acknowledges that the German preference for social cohesion versus the British emphasis on liberalization marks “the main dividing line between the two countries in their pursuit of an integrated European Single Market” (p. 133). Furthermore, in contrast to British resistance to tax harmonization, the Red-Green coalition considered this matter a determining factor for investment and employment creation in the EU. However, in obvious contrast to the French, both New Labour and the Red-Green advocated further liberalization of the European Single Market by reduction of trade barriers and closer cooperation on economic reform. In light of this partnership, Schweiger claims that Britain and Germany are “the only two member states amongst the larger states in the EU 25 who could lead the way towards finally achieving a major breakthrough in the abolition of protectionist practices and policies ... against more protectionist member states such as France” (p. 137).

In spite of high expectations in the late 1990s, European foreign and security policy remains “a difficult area for British-German co-operation” (pp. 137, 149).

Schweiger stresses the fundamentally different presuppositions on EU foreign and security policy, with Britain seeking national independence and Germany advocating QMV in decision-making. New Labour’s positive stance on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) since 1998 and the German government’s altered attitude towards military engagement in Kosovo and Afghanistan initially raised expectations for substantial British-German cooperation on EU foreign and security policy. By the end of 2001, “a strong consensus between Britain and Germany on the need to create a proper Common Foreign and Security Policy for the EU” (p. 142) and to establish a transatlantic EU-NATO link appeared to exist. In contrast, the French saw the EU’s Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) and the CFSP as alternatives to NATO. According to Schweiger, the British-German convergence here was larger than ever before. Later, British and German positions diverged, culminating in quarrels about military action against Iraq. New Labour sided with the U.S. government, whereas Red-Green aligned with France and adopted an almost anti-American stance, resulting in several new Franco-German initiatives in the development of the CFSP.

Despite these challenges to his argument, Schweiger is more confident in his predictions about EU expansion, for both countries have traditionally advocated EC/EU enlargement. However, the scope of enlargement is still controversial. While Britain promotes almost unlimited enlargement “as an opportunity to enhance security and economic stability for the whole of Europe” (p. 159), Germany is much more cautious in congruence with France’s skeptical stance on eastward enlargement. Scarce public finances prompted the Red-Green coalition to link German support for enlargement to demands for better burden-sharing, transitional periods and budgetary limits, and finally, a substantial reform of the CAP, a demand that Britain shares in order to reconcile with WTO standards. For Schweiger, this British-German consensus—suspended by the short-term Franco-German compromise on the adjustment of the CAP in 2002—is “a strong fundament for a future initiative on real reform” (p. 165). As a possible consequence, according to Schweiger, “France could indeed finally find itself sidelined by a large reform coalition on CAP, led by Britain and Germany” (p. 165).

In his conclusion on the significance of British-German cooperation, Schweiger assumes “a leadership triangle between Britain, France and Germany” as a realistic scenario in the future EU, providing that France accepts this option and Britain reconsiders its role as an

outsider in the EU in terms of EMU (p. 174).[1] Schweiger considers a “functioning working partnership between Britain and Germany” possible if both countries accept each other’s respective political culture and state traditions. Still, Schweiger rejects the idea that a new bilateral leadership axis is developing, concluding instead that “agenda-setting leadership in individual policy areas will be exercised by a variety of shifting partnerships between member states” (pp. 175-176).

Some inaccuracies and shortcomings blur the overall impression of the quality of Schweiger’s work. For example, in his introduction Schweiger describes the EU as an organization of fifteen member states, or refers to “a third British application” to the EC even though the second one has never been officially withdrawn (pp. 1, 23). More seriously, some terms used frequently remain vague. Schweiger often refers to “political cultures” and “national interests” without elaborating on these multifaceted and controversial concepts or treating how a “political culture” is reflected in international policy-making. Apart from general remarks on “the various interests which influence the formation of national government preferences” (p. 6), it also remains open what exactly “national interests” are, how they influence international bargaining, and how the international framework might re-influence national decision-making in general. Equally blurred is Schweiger’s concept of “political leadership.”

Most importantly, perhaps, Schweiger identifies both in the British and German case the “normalization” of European and foreign policies without explaining what

a “normal” foreign policy might be. Consequently, he stretches his argument beyond its explanatory capacity by assuming that due to the “normalization” of German foreign policy, German political elites now demonstrate a greater readiness to defend German “national interests” in the EU. He states: “As part of this process, the pretence of not having any national foreign policy interests than the deepening of European integration, which had been maintained by the leaders of the Bonn republic to an almost unnatural extent, has come to an end” (p. 168). Schweiger fails to consider that European integration or the German “role model Europeanness” have never been an end in themselves, but have always been means to reach well-defined political aims.

Apart from these shortcomings, however, Schweiger gives a respectable analysis of European policy correspondences between the Blair and Schröder governments. His results may stimulate further research on possible leadership constellations in the EU’s future. Furthermore, to his merit, Schweiger demonstrates that apart from differences in their approaches to European integration, British and German European policies have far more common ground than is commonly assumed.

#### Note

[1]. See William Wallace, “Das Führungsstrio Deutschland–Frankreich–Großbritannien: Europas zentrales Problem?” *Integration. Vierteljahresschrift des Instituts für Europäische Politik in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Arbeitskreis Europäische Integration* 28 (2005): 328-331.

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