The Continuing Suppression of Nationalism in the Federal Republic of Germany

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TO THE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE:

As thesis advisor for Julie Berlin,

I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

Thesis Advisor

1/30/03 Date
"Deutschland, Deutschland übert alles,
Über alles in der Welt!
(Germany, Germany, above all,
Above all in the world!)

~From das Deutschlandlied
by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, 1841
Table of Contents

1. Author’s Comments ...........................................5
2. Introduction ...................................................6
3. History of German Nationalism, 1871-1945 ...............6
4. Nationalism in Post World War II Germany ..........10
5. National Identity and Reunification ....................15
6. Recent Developments .......................................18
7. Conclusion ...................................................22
8. Works Cited ...................................................24
1. Author’s Comments

My interest in German society and politics stems from my German heritage and my curiosity about a people who, for the most part, consider me an outsider. The unique evolution of nationalism in the Federal Republic also captured my interest as a political scientist. History played an important role in shaping the development of Germans’ national pride which, consequently, played a large part in the formation of the country’s political and social atmosphere. The fact that German nationalism was making a brief reappearance in political discussions while I was searching for a topic intrigued me even further, especially since I was going to spend the 2001-2002 academic year studying at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich.

In my thesis proposal I stated that articles, books, and questionnaires would be my methods of collecting information. I also declared that my main challenge would be convincing people to speak with me. This would be difficult because nationalism is a sensitive subject usually avoided in German society. In November 2001, I mailed surveys to 12 embassies and consulates in Germany. I received no replies. I also distributed 200 surveys to LMU students and professors over a six month period. A total of 14 were returned to me, only eight from Germans. Due to this lack of responses, I depended mostly on secondary print sources when writing my thesis.

My research was complete before I returned to the states in July 2002. The final draft of my paper was finished in November 2002.
2. Introduction

Pride in one’s land and people exists in one form or another in almost every nation in the world, with one noticeable exception: the Federal Republic of Germany. The level of nationalism existing there is much lower than one would expect from a country of its power and size. This phenomenon credits its existence primarily to one group: the National Socialists, or Nazis, whose very name conjures up images of the Second World War and the Final Solution. Considering the devastating effects past German nationalism has had on the world, it is no wonder that Germans are wary of exhibiting pride in their country and society. However, as post-World War II generations grow up, the topic of nationalism is resurfacing in German society and politics. Despite claims that a resurgence of German patriotism is inevitable and close at hand, nationalism will, at least in the near future, remain absent in the Federal Republic. This is due to the horrific consequences past German nationalism has had on the world, the resulting ingrained inclination of German society to suppress its nationalistic tendencies, and its current concerns over negative reactions from the international community, specifically the European Union.

3. History of German Nationalism, 1871 - 1945:

In order to understand the complicated nature of nationalism in Germany, one must first examine its history. Nationalism was the most successful political force of the 19th
century (Hutchinson, et al, Preface). During this time there were two methods of exemplification, the first being the French idea of "inclusion" - essentially that anyone declaring loyalty to the civil French state was a 'citizen.' On the other hand, the German way was to define a nation in ethnic terms. Ethnicity in practice came down to speaking German and believing in the true destiny of Germany and her people (Hutchinson 47-8).

Germany’s 1871 unification under Otto von Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm I’s chancellor, failed to deliver the nation desired by the nationalist movement because the arrangement excluded Austria and the Germans living there (MacDonogh 217). With elected representatives unable to affect important policies came the creation of nationalist groups who looked to a future when they would have a chance to create the ideal Reich, one which would place Germany and its people above all others. To them the existing government was a step in the right direction, but too mild in many of its policies (Breuilly, 2001, p 115). In addition to this, many nationalists saw Kaiser Wilhelm II as being too weak to create a new German Reich, despite such remarks as "Aus dem Deutschen Reiche ist ein Weltreich geworden" or "out of the German realms has come a world empire." (MacDonogh 298). Fueled by this idea of a German Lebensraum and its resulting imperialistic ambition, Germany began an expansion, which inevitably ended with the First World War.

The events and consequences of World War I led to the creation of the Weimar Republic, which was seen by many as a
temporary government. The Communists saw it as a prelude to their revolution, while the conservatives saw it as a chance to bolster public support for the restoration of the German monarchy (Fritzsche 119). To the Nazis it was a time when they could hope to achieve the dreams of their predecessors by uniting Germany and ‘saving’ the German race (Kershaw 339). The Weimar Republic was eventually brought down from within by the conservative forces, who unwillingly had to hand over power to Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist party (Henig 44).

During his rise to power, Hitler had been able to capitalize on many Germans believing they had not yet achieved their rightful place in the world by promising them he would be a **Führer** who could restore Germany to her former glory (Broszat 76). Economic instability and the fear of communism also aided his political ascent (Broszat 82). The idea of a new strong Reich supported by the people appealed to many Germans who felt betrayed by the weak Weimar Republic and feared a Communist take-over. These beliefs were shared by many sections of German society, whose anxiety enabled the passing of anti-socialist statutes to stimulate the Nazi movement’s growth (Koch 35).

The driving force behind these laws was the idea of **Reichsfeinde**, ‘enemies of the state’ who were responsible for Germany’s insignificant role in the world (Koch 39). Since Karl Marx was Jewish, Jews also became associated with Communism and were labeled **Reichsfeinde** (Koch 40). Such actions did nothing to
stem the growth of socialism, but did cause society to separate into various social groups, a split, which the Nazis were able to use later on (Gellately 211).

The Nazis utilized past conceptions, such as the Reichsfeinde, to show how Germany was being undermined from within, and that only a strong party, one with the people’s support, could fight against such an enemy (Koch 50). It is clear that hatred and fear of Communism was nothing new in Germany; it was merely adapted by the Nazis to suit their purposes of gaining political momentum (Kershaw 472). It also shows how different the Nazis were from early German philosophers, such as Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, on whom many of their ideas were based. These early thinkers advocated freedom of thought and action and believed it possible for the German people to uphold their way of life while coexisting with other cultures (Mosse 79).

The image portrayed by the National Socialists is one of a race involved in a violent struggle for survival with other nationalities in which there can be only one winner (Mosse 281). This marked another radical change in German nationalism, which focused the people’s nationalism to garner support for the creation of one German Lebensraum. Such an environment would allow no racial or social diversity, thus ensuring the survival of the German way and place Germany in a true position of power (Shirer 385). This shift paved the way for World War II and the Holocaust.
4. Nationalism in Post World War II Germany

Whenever one discusses German nationalism, one must consider the German quest for national identity following its Nazi experience and post-war division. The reason for this is that German society’s ingrained inclination to suppress its nationalistic tendencies is strongly linked to the events, and consequences, of World War II. The death and destruction of the Second World War ended almost all nationalistic sentiments in Germany. Hitler, often referred to as ‘Germany’s greatest nationalist,’ achieved supreme control by appealing to the public’s national pride (Wehler 218). He took nationalism to the extreme limits, using it as a weapon against personal security and individual rights. This experience, coupled with the post-war evidence of the Holocaust, permanently damaged Germans’ faith in nationalism and is the sole cause for its continuing absence in modern German society (Breuilly 193).

On May 23, 1945 the Allies took control of a devastated Nazi Germany. The war in Europe was over. As a result of the Führer’s refusal to surrender, Germany had endured an extensive Allied bombing campaign that left most of the country in ruins. However, even more appalling than the damage resulting from the battles and bombing was the discovery of the Nazis’ death camps. As Allied soldiers arrived at these sites, they found themselves amidst a horrifying landscape of sick, starving prisoners and mass graves. From its inception, the death camp system alone was responsible for the deaths of approximately three million Jews.
The Jews were not, however, the only targets of the Reich’s racial policies, as between nine and ten million Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, gypsies, homosexuals, and others also died at the hands of the Nazis. These victims were all deemed ‘unfit to live’ by Germany’s leaders, a death sentence seemingly supported by all of German society through their inaction (Gellately 138).

Despite the clarity of their goals during the war, the Allies failed to prepare a detailed policy for dealing with Germany after the war (Fulbrook 129). Burdened with what became known as the “German question,” the victors struggled to determine what role Germany should play in the post-war international, and more specifically, European, arena. As asked by author Greg Nees in Germany: Unraveling an Enigma, “What was to be done with a nation that had already risen phoenixlike from the ashes of one world war only to start a second?” (15). Fearful of a resurgent Germany and hoping to avenge their losses in the war, many Europeans felt that Germany’s occupation and division by the Allied powers was a sufficient response to the German threat, as well as adequate punishment for their crimes. In Germany, however, this development served only to further divide a nation already suffering from the destruction and shame resulting from its Nazi experience.

The collapse of the Third Reich opened a new chapter of German history. Most Germans felt that after the end of the Nazi dictatorship, a break from their basic historical traditions was
necessary (Breuilly 257). Nationalist thinking was definitely included in this split. Nationalism, now almost always equated with National Socialism, acquired solely negative connotations in the Federal Republic.

With the guilt of the Holocaust and the shame of complete surrender weighing on their shoulders, Germans felt the difficulties of reemerging from the devastation of World War II. Yet the Cold War soon returned Germany to the center of international politics and forced the two German states to seek new viable roles and positions in a geographically and ideologically divided Europe (Turner 234). West German historian Michael Stürmer describes Germany’s predicament:

Partner of the American sea alliance in the West, part of the Soviet land empire in the East, loyal to irreconcilable systems of values and government, the uneasy heirs to German history are threatened as well as supported through this antagonism, whether they like it or not (188).

This dilemma helped to rebuild West Germany economically and socially in its first decades. The western integration efforts of Konrad Adenauer, who governed from 1949-1963, and Willy Brandt’s (1969-1974) “Ostpolitik,” consolidated the Federal Republic. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, 1974-1982, through his leadership in the European Community and NATO, earned West Germany international respect (Kirchner 164). Despite these achievements, West Germany still had to restrain itself from projecting power outside the NATO alliance and had to defer to American political leadership and dominance (Kirchner 179).
The precarious US-German relationship worsened in the 1980s. Known for his "great statesmanship," Helmut Schmidt set the stage for increased West German self-confidence. Although Germans and Americans have always found reasons to disagree on issues, friction had never been so deep before Schmidt (Carr 179). By the end of Schmidt's tenure as Chancellor in 1982, the West German public strongly questioned the underlying motives of American foreign policy under Ronald Reagan because it reminded many of the ongoing impact the Cold War was playing on Germany's political life (Carr 210).

During Helmut Kohl's 16 years as West Germany's Chancellor, he redefined the basics of German-American relations, emphasizing the fundamental system of common values. In his farewell speech for President Reagan on June 12, 1987, Kohl noted that German-American relations were based on "our commitment to freedom, the common heritage and civilization of our peoples, which rest upon the principles of democracy, individual freedom, and the rule of law" (Kohl). "Bilateral differences in opinions," he stated, "only follow naturally from major differences in size, geography, and global significance and it cannot shake the foundation of common values [existing between Washington and Berlin]" (Heiden 77). However, Kohl realized that West Germans had to consciously realize that these shared values were historically theirs before relations with the United States would improve (Heiden 86).

By discovering the widespread gap between political ideals and actual institutions, Kohl perceived U.S.-German problems to
be rooted in Germany’s problem of national identity (Lewis 47). While the West German Basic Law mandates adherence to a single German people, the events of World Wars I and II left a large gap between the constitutional ideal of one German identity and the reality of two German states. Due to the effects of National Socialism on the German psyche, West Germany’s national identity since 1945 had been defined purely in terms of economic growth and social security, a phenomenon which is still true today (Gellner 139).

Determined to close this identity gap, Kohl developed a new program called ‘national identity and moral re-orientation,’ which included a different approach to reunification. This concept urged West Germans to identify with positive historical and cultural values, such as nationalism, while assuaging the West’s and the East’s suspicions and fears of a revival of German power and pride (Fulbrook 27).

While West Germany battled with this problem, East Germany existed as part of the Soviet regime. The government soon declared its people citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), thus ensuring a completely separate East German identity (Williams 147). Unfortunately this was easier said than done. The GDR was the economic leader in the communist world; however, its success paled in comparison to that of West Germany, leaving its citizens yearning for the ‘riches’ of the west (Williams 152).

If ever a strong East German national identity existed, it was in the latter months of 1989. During this time, East Germans
forced concession after concession from its crumbling government, until it collapsed (Williams 155). With the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, the East German slogan ‘Wir sind das Volk’ (we are the people) became ‘Wir sind ein Volk’ (we are one people), and the difficult task of merging the national identities of the two Germanys began (Williams 161).

5. National Identity and Reunification

While the issues surrounding its Nazi past prove overwhelming on their own, Germany needed to address the wounds of its division as well. The Federal Republic’s continuing search for national identity is closely linked to the issue of reunification. However, the resulting consequences of reunification revived fears of German intolerance towards non-Germans, thus ensuring the continued suppression of nationalism in Germany.

While the issues involved here are vast, suffice it to say that German society suffered from Mauer im Kopf (wall in the head) syndrome. Although the country was no longer physically divided, its people seemed torn between illusions of unity and feelings of estrangement. As shown in a 1995 poll, for example, “72 percent of easterners [saw] themselves as second-class citizens and 27 percent [considered] themselves equal. [In this same survey,] 77 percent of western Germans considered Ossis (East Germans) to be equal citizens, while 22 percent sensed eastern inequality” (Verheyen 211).
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That easterners felt out of place in the ‘new’ Germany is not surprising given the debates concerning western domination in the reunification process and the common complaints by easterners that, “western Germans have too little understanding for eastern Germany” (Verheyen 212). As one can see, the two sides’ misperceptions of the other’s feelings were vast, yet they paled in comparison to the differences between Germany’s citizens and its immigrant population.

Since 1945, Germany had grounded itself in its self-definition as a home for all Germans and not a country of immigration (Lemke 8). On October 3, 1990, the 17 million citizens of the German Democratic Republic became citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany (Breuilly 311). Formal unification, coupled with the collapse of the Soviet Union, made Germany Europe’s strongest power.

With its new authoritative role in the world and its rising number of resident aliens, anxiety soon surfaced that Germany would revert to its former aggressive, nationalistic policies (Habermas 20). As noted by Verheyen, “for non-Germans...and especially for Germany’s neighbors, it is the question of German power and the need to ‘manage’ it that is most worrisome” (3). This situation was further inflamed in the 1990s with an influx of asylum seekers from Eastern Europe. Ill prepared for this rise in refugees, the ruling conservatives clung to the old mantra of ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’ and the public soon
divided into those who attacked immigrants and those who protested against foreigner discrimination (Hailbronner 2107).

As Germans began to realize that the costs of unification would far exceed original government projections, many Germans began entertaining ideas of targeting foreigners as the ones who should bear the responsibility. Germans for whom unification turned sour, particularly former Ossis who were blamed for the country’s suffering economy by Germans in the west looked to foreigners as scapegoats (Brubaker 165-189). It is a fact that both the number and intensity of hostile, criminal acts against foreigners increased after reunification (from 2,426 in 1991 to 6,336 in 1992) (Ohlemacher). Highly publicized attacks on foreigners in Hoyerswerda in 1991, Rostock in 1992, and Solingen in 1993 further inflamed fears, both within and outside of the Federal Republic, that German nationalism was being revived.

At the same time, hundreds of prominent Germans, including Chancellor Kohl, publicly condemned these racist and nationalistic acts and praised the idea of a ‘multicultural German society’ (Green 109). Average citizens also organized demonstrations denouncing the violence against foreigners. The number of Germans participating in these marches far exceeded those who advocated the attacks (Green 122).

In response to ever-growing numbers of immigrants, the Bundestag amended the Basic Law in 1993 to toughen its political asylum and immigration clauses. Many individuals worried that this move was a precursor to modernized Reichsfeinde statutes;
however, although signs of renewed nationalism remained visible, no laws hostile to foreigners were passed. On the contrary, the majority of passed and proposed legislation was beneficial to foreigners (Hailbronner 2112).

In order to alleviate domestic and international concerns over revived nationalism and to curb the racism brought on by unification and immigration, provincial and federal governments banned ten neo-Nazi organizations and sentenced several leaders of far right-wing organizations to prison for 'inciting fear' (O’Brien 114). In 1993 the German parliament amended the Victims Indemnity Law to make foreign victims equal to Germans for benefits. A year later, Helmut Kohl’s government successfully proposed that the Bundestag expand the powers of the police and German intelligence service to apprehend right-wing extremists, as well as to ban all neo-Nazi symbols from public (O’Brien 114). This came two years after the government reserved 20 million Deutschmarks per year to counter violence against foreigners in the new Bundesländer (Schneider 93-4). Individual provinces launched similar programs, and from 1993 to 1994 the number of reported violent crimes against foreigners decreased by half (Schneider 94).

6. Recent Developments:

The ongoing process of European integration has further complicated the question of whether or not nationalism will reemerge in the Federal Republic. The current political and economic dominance of Germany in the European Union proves
extremely worrisome for many European politicians who fear the rise of another period of German nationalism in Europe. However, the focus is quite different on the German side of this issue. Struggling to overcome the shame of the past and to define German identity and nationhood after decades of division, most Germans view the ‘German Question’ differently than their European counterparts, approaching it primarily as a debate over their national identity rather than their role in the international arena (Verheyen 7). As one can imagine, the different impressions of Germany’s role in Europe have led the Federal Republic to tread lightly wherever the nationalism debate has arisen.

As the twentieth century came to a close, Germans’ national pride remained focused on their country’s economic stability and its leadership role in the European Union (Anderson 38). As the Federal Republic became engrossed in furthering European integration, its battle with nationalism subsequently disappeared from the domestic agenda. However, nationalism reappeared on the international scene in February 2000 when Austria’s far right Freedom Party, led by Jörg Haider, joined the ruling government coalition. This led to a freeze on all bilateral diplomatic relations with Austria by the fourteen other members of the European Union (Hoge).

None of the sanctions imposed on Austria threatened its continued membership in the European Union or its participation; however, Austrian ambassadors in EU capitals seeking meetings with ministers were repeatedly denied, Austrian candidates for
positions in international organization were rejected, and Austrian businesses began to suffer (Riding). This unprecedented action is aimed at reflecting deep unease about nationalistic parties participating in the European Union. One reason why the remaining members took such a united stand was that they wanted to send a strong warning signal throughout the EU (Hoge). This was due to the rising popularity of rightist groups in France, Belgium, and Italy. After the 2001/02 elections, strong rightist parties had earned seats in Italy’s conservative government and Denmark’s center-right coalition. In 2002, the strong showing of the National Front in the French presidential election re-ignited European concerns regarding nationalism. This wariness is shared by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder, who declared that the inclusion of such groups in European governments would create a new nationalistic, xenophobic threat to European integration (Cohen, *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*).

Considering that modern German nationalism is rooted solely in the country’s recovered political and economic power, the fierce backlash against Austria only strengthened Germans’ resolve to quell their nationalistic tendencies. The majority of Germans are so anxious to escape the taint of the past that they have become the most ardent supporters of European integration. Germans believe that a united and federal Europe can help its member nations avoid previous mistakes brought on by nationalism (Mazower 397).
Despite the strong urge to prove to the world that the events of World War II will never be repeated, Germans, especially the younger generations, still feel the desire to reestablish national pride that would go beyond politics and economics. They hope to refocus this new nationalism on the past 50 years of stable democratic government in Germany, its peaceful reunification, and its continuing efforts to further European integration (Anderson 46). Such a redefinition would hopefully separate modern-day German nationalism from its Nazi legacy, thus appeasing the worries of the Federal Republic and its neighbors. Unfortunately, such a transformation does not seem likely in the near future as the following example proves.

Although many conflicts exit between Germany and its European partners, none prove more heated than that illustrated by a debate between French president Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the December 2000 European Union summit in Nice. Halting all progress on the scheduled agenda, the debate began when Schröder made the request that his country receive an increased number of votes at the EU’s ministerial meetings. Noting that the population of Germany exceeds that of France by 20 million, the Chancellor demanded that Germany be afforded a larger voice than that of the historically, yet disproportionately, more powerful France. Outraged by the request, Chirac publicly blocked Schröder’s proposal, citing “history” as a reason to deny Germany any voting power superior to that of France. As noted by Roger Cohen in an article for the
New York Times, Chirac argued that, “history dictated parity between France and Germany” (A.5).

This debate is clearly one of the most important within the context of European integration. The incident described above, for example, halted and overshadowed the entire EU agenda at the Nice summit. Indeed, the quest to determine the role that a reunified Germany will and/or should play in the Europe of today and tomorrow continues to prove difficult for Germans and non-Germans alike.

7. Conclusion:

As an international organization, the European Union is arguably one of the most unique and complex alliances in the world. Its goals stem from complicated economic, political, social, and cultural agendas. In an area historically torn by nationalistic conflict, the EU proposes to overcome the struggles of its past and to unify the peoples of Europe under a common European identity. In order to achieve this daunting goal, the Federal Republic must come to terms with its nationalistic history, a process easier said than done.

Government officials regularly remind German society that National Socialist extremism and racism still pose a serious threat to Germany and her people (Thierse). Nevertheless, with a new generation of Germans unwilling to live in the shadows of the past, the German government, led by Chancellor Schröder, is beginning to show signs of burgeoning nationalism (Cohen, New York Times). Germany will at some point be forced to take a
collective stance on the past and determine if May 8, 1945 is the so-called *Tag der Befreiung* (day of deliverance) or the anniversary of the Nazi defeat.

Many younger German citizens believe that their country should strive to define itself less in terms of the past and turn more toward the future. Despite this growing willingness to openly discuss German nationalism, the painful memories of history still linger in the minds of Germans and their European neighbors. Therefore the resulting cautious attitude of the European Union regarding this issue, specifically in relation to the Federal Republic, is not surprising. It also explains the continuing propensity of German society to suppress its nationalistic tendencies. Until all Germans are confident that increased patriotism would only represent pride in their democratic tradition and resulting positive accomplishments, nationalism in Germany will remain restrained.
Works Cited


