Awkward Relations? Britain and Germany in Europe since the Second World War

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The conference aimed to critically re-examine the history of Anglo-German relations, especially with regards to the two countries' respective positions in Europe. Thus, the conference focused not only on the bilateral relationship in isolation, but it also sought to investigate Anglo-German relations within wider multilateral frameworks. Given the current political situation the forthcoming British EU referendum loomed in the background of many contributions. The conference illustrated how many angles and analytical levels can be brought to bear to the research on one of the central relationships of post-WWII Europe. The contributions were a mix of broad perspectives and more specific case studies. Each paper analysed Anglo-German history from a different angle and shed light on different aspects of what bound both countries together, or divided them. The contributions ranged from more societal views, to diplomatic, trade, financial or military aspects of Anglo-German relations.

The first two papers had a distinct cold war theme in common. The panel was chaired by PATRICK SALMON (Foreign Office UK). CHRISTOPH LAUCHT (Swansea) examined the role of the Kiel Canal in the context of the Anglo-German maritime rivalry. Laucht argued that examining the changing perceptions on the Kiel Canal offers important lessons on how British attitudes towards Germany changed in the early cold war. The canal went from epitomising the Anglo-German naval rivalry to being included in allied defence plans after 1948. With cold war tensions rising, the canal thus reacquired a cultural and military significance in the emerging bipolar world order.

DETLEV MARES (Darmstadt) examined the personal attitude of Margaret Thatcher to the question of German reunification. Mares argued that Thatcher had many misgivings about a unified Germany but found it impossible to consistently contest Kohl's policy of swift reunification. Thatcher's main argument against reunification was founded in her perception of Germany's past, which to some extent was viewed by her through a lens of anti-German stereotypes. Mares held that Thatcher's view of history left her unable to see the future of Germany in the same way as the Germans at large or Kohl in particular have. Thatcher's main worry was about the European balance of power being upset by a reunited Germany. Finally, Mares considered the current position of Germany in the EU, which he believed has confirmed Thatcher's view of potential imbalances in Europe, but has proved her wrong in assuming this would emerge from a German desire for hegemony.

The keynote speech of the first day was delivered by Sir RICHARD J. EVANS (Cambridge). Sir Richard investigated the role of war-time images and stereotypes in the bilateral relationship since 1945. Though many such images remained dominant in British discourses during the immediate post-war period, their importance gradually diminished during the 1960s, which allowed for a much more positive view of German businesses or sports achievements in the UK. Germany thus became a place to do business but remarkably few Britons wanted to go there on holiday. Yet Sir Richard convincingly showed how in cartoons, the media, television and film the references to WWII as „Britain's finest hour" lived on. In the late 1980s and 1990s anti-German sentiment re-merged, a phenomenon Sir Richard attributed to a „crisis of English identity". This resurfacing of anti-German stereotypes coincided with questions of political devolution in Britain and a lurch towards populism in Fleet Street.

On the second day the focus lay on the multilateral and geopolitical aspects of the Anglo-German relationship. The first panel of the second day was chaired by JONATHAN WRIGHT (Oxford). RAINER LIEDTKE (Regensburg) asked how British cartoonists looked at the world on the other

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side of the English Channel. This study was especially interesting because many of the issues resonate with the way the current Brexit debate is portrayed in the British popular press. Liedtke argued that when British cartoonists portrayed Europe they often drew German characters, with Prussian caricatures featuring prominently.

JASPER TRAUTSCH (Regensburg) asked how Germany came to be regarded as being part of „the west", so shortly after having been the archenemy for two world wars. Trautsch argued that the iron curtain created a separation that did not conform to the notion of the west as it had been seen before WWII, defined as Atlanticist, liberal and democratic. Trautsch convincingly demonstrated how the notion of „the west" was changed to give Christianity more weight, in order to incorporate a re-democratised West Germany and thus more effectively resist communism. Therefore, religious considerations were incorporated into the „western" value framework in order to enhance the unity of western countries, which now also included West Germany.

The keynote speech of the second day was delivered by N. PIERS LUDLOW (London). Piers Ludlow compellingly argued that the post-WWII Anglo-German relation served both countries well but was outshined by stronger relationships of Britain with the USA and Germany with France. Ludlow highlighted the similarity of British and West German positions within the wider transatlantic relationship during the Cold War. Yet, he argued compellingly that on the issue of European integration Germany and the UK agreed more than they disagreed, especially on issues such as fiscal policy, EU/EC enlargement or the global outlook of the European community. However, Ludlow contended that agreements were matched with well-publicised disagreements, which came to dominate the perception of the relationship, especially since to some extent the efforts to rekindle the relationship were found wanting.

The second panel of the second day was chaired by ALEXANDER REINFELDT (Hamburg). JENS KREUTZFELDT (Karlsruhe) asked how monetary policies of Germany and the UK have fared in the context of European integration. Kreutzfeldt provided an explanation of how both countries characterised the role of money in a globalised economy differently. Whilst the German model revolved around lending through banks in the UK businesses were more likely to raise money through the stock market. In the ERM (Exchange Rate Mechanism) the Deutschmark provided the stability. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, however, had to balance commitments to currency stability, the requirements and constraints of the domestic economy with British obligations to the ERM.

MECHTHILD HERZOG (Luxemburg) asked how parliamentary traditions and conventions from Germany and the UK shaped the European Parliament (EP). Herzog showed how differing institutional traditions and styles have influenced the way debates were conducted in the European Parliament. Germany was influential in establishing the EP parliamentary groups, which German MEPs adopted as their new political groupings. British politicians retained a much stronger connection to their party and Westminster. Herzog convincingly argued that British politicians brought a much more confrontational style of debate to Brussels and Strasbourg. For instance, MEPs from the UK introduced and subsequently used question time much more actively than their German counterparts. Despite their differences however, Herzog contented, both groups of parliamentarians left an important legacy to the style of parliamentary debate.

LUCIA COPPOLARO (Padova) studied the Anglo-German relationship during the Tokyo round, 1973-79, in the context of trade liberalisation. Coppolaro persuasively argued that the Tokyo round evolved to a question of Western countries' visions for their economies in the face of an economic downturn. Thus, Coppolaro argued that economic difficulties made countries less willing to liberalise their economies. This was particularly true for the British position, which became more protectionist as the crisis deepened, pushing the UK from a liberally oriented alliance with Germany and the USA towards more protectionist countries, such as France. Therefore, Coppolaro concluded that the outcome of the

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Tokyo round did not represent a liberal consensus but was shaped by diverging views on the management of economies in times of crises.

The closing panel of the conference was chaired by MATHIAS HAEUSSLER (Cambridge). ANDREW HOLT (The National Archives, UK) examined the attitude of the British and German governments to the Multilateral Force (MLF). According to Holt, the core questions were how much leeway the Germans would get and whether or not they would at some point want a nuclear weapon of their own. Holt compellingly argued that whilst in the UK ministries, especially the Ministry of Defence, were against the MLF it was Germany and the USA who forcefully argued for pooling European military resources. Eventually, however, British Prime Minister Douglas-Home concluded he could not risk damaging the Anglo-American relationship by breaking with the commitments Harold Macmillan had made at Nassau in order to acquire Polaris.

HAROLD MOCK (Virginia) presented a paper on British, German and US policies towards NATO and the EC, in the fields of defence as well as monetary policies. Mock contrasted British and German attitudes and approaches to multilateral frameworks, between 1973 and 1979. He argued that Germany was more successful in fulfilling her commitments towards both NATO and the EC, which was due to Chancellor Schmidt's insistence on making Germany a reliable partner in international relations. The UK, however, was beset by fiscal as well as political challenges at home, such as being forced to take an IMF loan. In addition, Mock argued that an ambivalent attitude to the EC left the UK unable to effectively manage her commitments to NATO and the EC, at the detriment of Britain's international standing.

SUSAN COLBOURN (Toronto) examined how the UK and Germany, viewed Reagan's sanctions against European technology exports to Poland and the USSR, which were designed to stop the building of the Siberian pipeline, from 1981-82. European countries vehemently opposed the sanctions, which caused a deep rift within NATO. Colbourn argued that European reactions were not homogenous, except in their condemnations of the embargo. Colbourn argued that the UK saw the issue as an opportunity to improve Britain's standing in a Cold War context, by improving ties with the western partners. Helmut Schmidt wanted to go ahead with the pipeline but insisted that the conflict had to be seen in the larger context of the Cold War, which meant in his view that the West had to stand together.

In his closing remarks, Mathias Haeussler (Cambridge) emphasised that an important aspect of the last debate was a worry in the UK about a strengthened US-German relationship, whereby it was less clear where British priorities lay. In many ways this ambivalence of the British position summed up one of the key themes of the conference, which was that differences in outlook on past and present characterise the history of the Anglo-German relationship – to the point of perhaps becoming „awkward".

In conclusion, the conference illustrated how multifaceted the research on the history of Anglo-German relations is. All conference contributions emphasised the importance of the Anglo-German relationship. The various angles employed in the papers highlighted presciently the challenges and different views that distinguished each country's approach. These aspects manifested themselves in the British views of the continent at large and Germany in particular, which translated in varying degrees into policy. The conference therefore persuasively showed that many questions of the history of Anglo-German relations have not yet been conclusively settled, which will continue to provide for a stimulating debate. Whether or not a „Brexit" will materialise, leading to a U-turn in British policy on EU membership, gave many of these papers an exhilarating ring of current affairs.

Conference Overview:

Christoph Laucht (Swansea): „Destroy – Internationalize – Defend: The Kiel Canal and British-West German Relations in the Early Cold War, c. 1945–55"

Detlev Mares (Darmstadt): „Margaret Thatcher and German Reunification"

Chair: Patrick Salmon (Foreign Office UK)

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Keynote 1
Sir Richard J. Evans (Cambridge): „Forever Re-Fighting the War? British Attitudes to Germany since 1945“

Introduction: Mathias Haeussler (Cambridge)

Rainer Liedtke (Regensburg): „The Germanization of Europe in British Newspaper Cartoons since the Late Nineteenth Century“

Jasper Trautsch (Regensburg): „Great Britain and the Westernization of Germany after 1945“

Chair: Jonathan Wright (Oxford)

Keynote 2
N. Piers Ludlow (LSE): „A Most Business-like Relationship: Anglo- German Relations since 1945 and the Inadequacies of Behaving Normally“

Introduction: Alexander Reinfeldt (Hamburg)

Jens Kreutzfeldt (Karlsruhe): „Floating into reserve? Anglo-German relations as outlet and catalyst in European reform debate after 1945“

Mechthild Herzog (Luxemburg): „When the Right Honourable Gentlemen Joined the Sober Europhiles: British and German Members of the European Parliament in the 1970s“

Lucia Coppolaro (Padova): „Strained Relations: the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany in the Tokyo Round of GATT negotiations (1973–1979)“

Chair: Alexander Reinfeldt (Hamburg)

Andrew Holt (The National Archives, UK): „Britain, West Germany and the Multilateral Force (MLF)“

Harold Mock (Virginia): „Awkward Allies: NATO-EC Policy as a Source of Anglo-German Rivalry in the 1970s“

Susan Colbourn (Toronto): „Pulling 'Chestnuts Out of the Fire' Britain, West Germany, and the European Position on Siberian Pipeline, 1981–1982“

Chair: Mathias Haeussler (Cambridge)

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